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THE CASE

OF

REBELLIOUS SUSAN

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

Author of "*The Liars*," "*Mrs. Dane's Defence*," "*The Tempter*," "*The Masqueraders*," "*The Crusaders*," "*The Dancing Girl*," "*Judah*," "*The Middleman*," "*The Triumph of the Philistines*," "*Michael and His Lost Angel*," "*The Rogue's Comedy*," "*The Physician*," "*The Manœuvres of Jane*," "*Carnac Sahib*," "*The Lackey's Carnival*," "*The Goal*," &c.

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SIR RICHARD KATO, Q.C.
ADMIRAL THE HON. SIR JOSEPH DARBY. } Uncles to LADY SUSAN.

JAMES HARABIN (LADY SUSAN'S Husband).
FERGUSSON PYBUS.
LUCIEN EDENSOR.
MR. JACOMB.
KIRBY.
Footmen.
Hotel-Waiter.

LADY SUSAN HARABIN.
LADY DARBY.
MRS. QUESNEL (INEZ).
ELAINE SHRIMPTON.

ACT I.—Drawing-room at Mr. Harabin's in Mayfair.

(*Ten months pass.*)

ACT II.—Sir Richard Kato's sitting-room at the St. Mildred's Hotel, Westbay.

(*Fifteen months pass.*)

ACT III.—At Sir Richard Kato's house in Harley Street.

TO MRS. GRUNDY.

DEAR AND HONOURED MADAM,

In dedicating this little comedy to you I have no other object in view than that of bribing and blinding your well-known susceptibilities, and of endeavouring to win over and conciliate that large body of English playgoers who take their opinions and morals ready-made from you, the august and austere effigy of our national taste and respectability.

The truth is, my dear lady, I am a little fearful that without some such shelter as your powerful protection, many excellent persons may be in doubt as to the exact moral which this comedy sets forth; or indeed may go further and doubt whether there is a moral in it at all; or, dreadest and cruellest alternative, may actually proclaim that it is *im*-moral. The mere possibility of this latter alternative is so painful to me, that I am obliged to recall a conversation which I recently overheard in a railway carriage.

"Ah, who wrote that play?" I heard one passenger inquire of another.

"That man Henry Arthur Jones," replied his neighbour.

"I hate that fellow," said the other. "He's always educating the people."

Now though I cannot honestly credit myself with any such unselfish motive in writing plays as my fellow-passenger ascribed to me, I could not help feeling a glow of virtuous pride when I found that my natural ingrained tendencies were so salutary and so patriotic. And if I have in any way contributed to the State Education grant, or lowered the School Board rate in any parish, I hope I shall not be deprived of the merit that attaches to such public benefactions merely because they have been quite involuntary and unsuspected on my part.

Now, my dear Mrs. Grundy, I will not go so far as to say that I know with any degree of certainty what the moral of this comedy is. I will leave that for you and the public to discover. And I am very hopeful in this respect when I remember that one of our keenest and most analytical critics, in interpreting for us a recent masterpiece of the lobworm-symbolic school, declared that though he was very doubtful what the play did mean, yet he was quite sure that it meant a very great deal. And so, my dear ma'am, I will not pin myself down to any one, definite, precise, hard-and-fast, cut-and-dried moral in this comedy. Why should I? Why should I needlessly limit the possible scope of its beneficent operation, or curb my boundless desire that all sorts of unexpected collateral good may

haphazardly visit those who witness its representation?

I know of no task wherein the generosity and the ingenuity of the critical playgoer may be more profitably employed than in finding a profound significance in passages where the author himself has never detected it; and in dragging to light profound moral truths from hiding-places where the author himself has never imagined them to be lurking. Therefore, my dear Mrs. Grundy, if you will be pleased to wink at any little outside indiscretion, and if the public will set its wits to work, I have no doubt a very serviceable moral is to be extracted from this comedy.

Look at life itself, my dear lady. The moral of it is not very obvious at first sight, but there must be a tremendous moral hidden somewhere in it. Nay, there must be hundreds of morals in it, and I am not without a suspicion that in claiming only one moral for this comedy I have done myself a very grave injustice. For all I know it may be teeming with morals.

But perhaps you will say that my comedy is quite unlike life. I am aware that I have no warrant in the actual facts of the world around me for placing on the English stage an instance of English conjugal infidelity. There is, I believe, madam, a great deal of this kind of immorality in France, but I am sure you will rejoice to hear that a very careful and searching inquiry has not resulted in estab-

lishing any well-authenticated case in English life. And even had the inquiry revealed a quite opposite state of things, I know you will agree with me that it would be far better to make up our minds that the facts are wrong and stick to that, than to allow the possibility of anything hurtful to our continued self-esteem and self-righteousness. I am too sensible, madam, of the honour of belonging to the same nation as your own revered self to do anything to impair its holy self-esteem and worship of its own conviction that it is the most moral, most religious, most heaven-favoured nation under the sun.

Happily, as I say, there is not the slightest necessity for disturbing our cherished national belief that immorality is confined to the Continent, and especially to France. Let us, therefore, again thank Heaven that we are not as other nations are, and let us avoid seeing or hearing anything that may disturb our belief in our own moral superiority.

So, my dear madam, I have frankly to own that I have not the slightest justification in fact for laying the scene of my comedy in England, and I am again justly open to the charge, so often made against me, of being quite false to life as my countrymen see it.

And now, my dear lady, having endeavoured to win your approbation by every means in my power, let me again say that all I am anxious for is that you should not too hastily condemn the piece because its morality is intrinsic and not extrinsic. For I

do stoutly affirm, adorable arbitress of British morals, that there is a profound moral somewhere in this piece. Only, if I dare hint so much to you, dear lady, it is well at times not to be too ferociously moral. There is a time to be ferociously moral, and a time to refrain. The present, my dear Mrs. Grundy, is an eminently suitable time to refrain. Let us not be always worrying books and plays for their morals. Let us not worry even life itself for too plain, or too severe a moral. Let us look with a wise, sane, wide-open eye upon all these things; and if a moral rises naturally from them let us cheerfully accept it, however shocking it may be; if not, let us not distress ourselves.

If, my dear ma'am, you cannot see any moral in this little comedy, take it for granted there is one, and—go and see the play again. Go and see it, my dear Mrs. Grundy, until you do find a moral in it. And remember that it is not only trifles like this that are naturally repugnant to you. Remember how hateful to you are all the great eternal things in literature and art. So much so, that if our English Bible itself were to be now first presented to the British public, you would certainly start a prosecution against it for its indecency and its frightful polygamistic tendencies.

Refrain, my dear lady! Refrain! Refrain! And if you must have a moral in my comedy, suppose it to be this—"That as women cannot retaliate openly, they may retaliate secretly—and *lie!*"

And a truly shocking moral it is, now we have got it. But oh, my dear Mrs. Grundy, Nature's morality is not your morality, or mine. Nature has ten thousand various morals, all of them as shocking as truth itself. The very least of them would fright our isle from its propriety if it were once guessed at.

Refrain, my dear madam! Refrain! And—excuse me—isn't that foot of yours rather too near that tender growing flower—I mean the English drama? And your foot is so heavy! Don't stamp out the little growing burst of life. Refrain, my dear lady! Refrain! Adieu!

Yours, with the deepest reverence for all things worthy of reverence,

HENRY ARTHUR JONES.

DIEPPE,
August 28th, 1894.

P. S. My comedy isn't a comedy at all. It's a ragedy dressed up as a comedy.

ACT I.

SCENE. *Drawing-room at* Mr. HARABIN'S; *an elegantly furnished room in Mayfair. At back, in centre, fireplace, with fire burning. To right of fireplace a door leading to* LADY SUSAN'S *sitting-room. A door down stage left.*

Enter Footman *left showing in* LADY DARBY.

LADY DARBY [*a lady of about fifty*]. Where is Lady Susan now?

FOOTMAN. Upstairs in her sitting-room, my lady. [*Indicating the door right.*

LADY D. Where is Mr. Harabin?

FOOTMAN. Downstairs in the library, my lady.

Enter left INEZ, *a widow of about thirty.*

LADY D. [*To* First Footman.] Tell Lady Susan I wish to see her at once.

INEZ. And will you say that I am here too?

[*Exit* Footman *at door right.*

LADY D. [*Going affectionately to* INEZ, *shaking hands very sympathetically.*] My dear Mrs. Quesnel, you know?

INEZ. Sue wrote me a short note saying that she had discovered that Mr. Harabin had——and that she'd made up her mind to leave him.

LADY D. Yes, that's what she wrote me. Now, my dear, you're her oldest friend. You'll help me to persuade her to—to—look over it and hush it up.

INEZ. Oh, certainly. It's the advice everybody always gives in such cases, so I suppose it must be right. What are the particulars?

LADY D. I don't know. But with a man like Harabin—a gentleman in every sense of the word —it can't be a very bad case.

Enter LADY SUSAN, *about twenty-seven, door right, followed by the* Footman, *who crosses and goes off at door left.* LADY DARBY *goes to* LADY SUSAN *very affectionately and sympathetically, kisses her in silence.* LADY SUSAN, *having kissed* LADY DARBY, *goes to* INEZ, *kisses her.*

LADY S. Inez! I'm so glad you've come! I knew I could rely upon you.

INEZ. Yes, dearest—naturally! What can I do?

LADY S. [*Taking a bundle of letters from her pocket.*] Read those letters. I found them in his *secrétaire.* They explain it all. And then tell me if you wouldn't do as I'm going to do.

LADY D. [*Very sympathetically.*] My poor girl! My poor girl!

LADY S. Oh! please don't. I'm not an object of pity. At least, if I am now, I won't be one very long.

LADY D. What do you mean?

LADY S. I'm going to follow Jim's example. I'm going to pay him back in his own coin.

LADY D. [*Soothingly.*] Yes, dear, yes! That's what we all say at first, but we don't mean it. And it can't be as bad as that.

LADY S. As bad as what?

LADY D. Mr. Harabin may have been indiscreet——

LADY S. Indiscreet! [*Enraged laugh.*

LADY D. And infatuated——

LADY S. Infatuated! [*Enraged laugh.*

LADY D. And led away——

LADY S. Indiscreet! Infatuated! Led away!

LADY D. My dear, we may call it what we like, but men are men, and they are led away, and the rest of it.

LADY S. Very well. I'm going to be indiscreet, and infatuated, and the rest of it.

LADY D. My dear child, that's impossible.

LADY S. Not at all, my dear aunt.

[INEZ *gives back the letters to* LADY SUSAN *with a little sigh and a sympathetic look, and a little shake of the head.* LADY SUSAN *takes them.*

LADY D. My dear Sue, of course you're angry and upset for the moment—and quite right—quite right

I don't blame you—but after all it can't be such a very bad case.

LADY S. Every case is a bad case.

LADY D. Oh no, my dear! Some cases are much worse than others; and when you come to my age you'll be thankful that yours is no worse than a respectable average case.

LADY S. Respectable average case! No! that's just what my case shall not be. It sha'n't be average, and perhaps it won't be respectable. Read those letters.

[*Giving letters to* LADY DARBY. LADY DARBY *takes the letters and reads them apart.*

LADY S. [*To* INEZ.] Well?

INEZ. Well, dearest, it is rather dreadful——

LADY S. Rather?

INEZ. But look at poor dear Mrs. Barringer!

LADY S. [*Enraged.*] Ah! that's it! And in a few days all my friends will be saying, "Look at poor dear Lady Sue!" They sha'n't say that. They shall say, "Look at poor dear Jim Harabin!" If somebody is to be pitied, it shall be Jim.

INEZ. But, dear, you won't do anything in a hurry?

LADY S. If I don't, I can't do anything at all. I can't rake it up in a year's time.

INEZ. No, but I should wait till——

LADY S. Till the next time. No! I've made up my mind. I'm going back home with you now

—that is, if you'll have me for a day or two till I can make my plans.

INEZ. Certainly, dearest; you know you're welcome.

LADY S. There's a dear! Phillips is packing my things. I shall be ready in an hour.

INEZ. Of course, dear, I'm delighted. But I'm going to Egypt in a few days.

LADY S. Oh, that's splendid! We can go together, and have a good time. Ah, Inez, how lucky you've been! [INEZ *looks surprised.*] No, I don't mean that, dear, but still a widow's position has some advantages, hasn't it?

LADY D. [*Having read the letters, sighs very deeply, and shakes her head.*] The old story! The old story! [*Gives them back to* LADY SUSAN.

LADY S. [*Taking letters, putting them in pocket.*] And what would you advise me to do?

LADY D. I should give him a good sound talking to. I should make his life a misery to him for a fortnight; then—I should never mention the matter again.

LADY S. [*Enraged laugh.*] Ha, ha! Ha, ha! [*To* INEZ.] And what would you advise me to do?

INEZ. Well—I shouldn't nag him. I should be utterly broken-hearted and mutely reproachful. I should look more intensely interesting, and a little paler, and wear prettier frocks, and give him a better dinner each evening, and when he had begged

forgiveness for a long while, I should find it in my heart to—to forgive him.

LADY S. [*Outburst of enraged laughter.*] Ah! that's it! We are such traitors to ourselves. If we could only bind ourselves together——

LADY D. A trades-union of our sex? My dear, seven-eighths of us are natural blacklegs to start with.

LADY S. Yes, and that's why men are spoilt. It's our cowardice and weakness and falsehood that make them such brutes.

LADY D. They are brutes!

INEZ. Yes, but that's God's fault more than woman's.

LADY D. I don't know whose the fault is, but there's no denying they are brutes.

INEZ. [*Sighs.*] I'm afraid they are; but I don't see what we are to do except take them as we find them and make the best of them.

Enter Footman *announcing* SIR RICHARD KATO. SIR RICHARD KATO, *a bright, shrewd man of the world about fifty, enters.* *Exit* Footman.

SIR R. [*Very sympathetically.*] My dear Sue! How d'ye do, Lady Darby? How d'ye do, Mrs. Quesnel? [*Shakes hands—a pause*—SIR RICHARD *looks keenly from one to the other.*] Anything important under discussion?

LADY S. You may speak out, Uncle Dick; they know all about it.

SIR R. Then I'm sure they are of the same opinion that I am.

LADY D. I've strongly advised Sue to—to make the best of it.

INEZ. And so have I.

LADY S. Oh, yes! "Patch it up!" "Don't make a fuss about it!" That's what outsiders always say to a woman.

SIR R. And, my dear Sue, as outsiders see most of the game, you may depend, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, outsiders are right.

[LADY DARBY *and* INEZ *talk together a little apart.*

LADY S. Ah, you've never been deceived!

SIR R. Well, I've never been *married.* But I've had twenty-five years' practice in the Divorce Court, and if I'm not qualified to give advice in a matter of this kind, I don't know any man in England who is.

LADY S. [*Impetuously.*] I don't want advice. I want sympathy.

SIR R. Well, I am sure you will have the deepest sympathy from all——

LADY S. [*Enraged.*] I don't want sympathy. I won't have it.

SIR R. My dear Sue, what do you want?

LADY S. I want somebody to show me some way of paying him back without—without——

SIR R. Without losing your place in society and your self-respect. Ah! that's the difficulty. There's an immense reputation to be made as a moralist by any man who will show you ladies the way to break the seventh commandment without leaving any ill effects upon society.

LADY S. Well, he'd better make haste or we shall find out the way ourselves.

SIR R. [*Shakes his head.*] My dear Sue, believe me, what is sauce for the goose will never be sauce for the gander. In fact, there is no gander sauce, eh, Lady Darby?

LADY D. No. If there had been, our grandmothers would have found it out and left us the receipt for it.

SIR R. [*Very affectionately.*] Come, come, Sue! [*Putting his arm very tenderly on hers.*] Come, now! Let us talk this over quite calmly and sensibly. [*With great tenderness.*]

LADY S. Oh, yes! I know what you mean. But I won't listen to another word unless you promise you won't advise me to patch it up.

SIR R. I promise. Now, what is the exact point at which we have arrived? Where are we? What were you saying when I came in? [*Looking from one to the other.*]

LADY S. I'd just said that men are brutes.

LADY D. And I had agreed.

INEZ. And I too—with some qualifications.

SIR R. And I agree with you—without any quali-

fications. Men are brutes. Once recognise that simple fact in all its bearings, and we start on a basis of sound philosophy.

LADY S. I don't want any basis, or any sound philosophy. I want my revenge.

SIR R. [*To* LADY DARBY.] Leave her to me for a little while, and come back again.

LADY D. And what's to be done with Mr. Harabin?

SIR R. What can be done with him?

LADY D. Somebody ought to give him a good sound talking to.

SIR R. Leave him to me, too.

LADY D. [*Suddenly bethinking herself.*] Good gracious!

INEZ. What's the matter?

LADY D. I was going to Waterloo to meet Sir Joseph when Sue's letter came, and I forgot all about him. His ship's just come into Portsmouth. I shall miss him now. [*Taking out watch.*] And I haven't seen the dear man for six months.

[*Exit very hurriedly.* INEZ *is following.*

LADY S. Inez!

INEZ. Yes, dearest.

LADY S. I'm coming with you.

INEZ. No, dearest—I'll go and get your room ready, and come back in half-an-hour, and if you are still in the same mind——

LADY S. You'll take me with you?

INEZ. We'll see about it. [*Exit.*

SIR R. [*Very tenderly.*] Come, Sue, I've only your welfare at heart. I've no personal interest to serve.

LADY S. Why did you let me get married?

SIR R. My dear, if you remember, you were so anxious and so sure of happiness——

LADY S. But why didn't you tell me what marriage was?

SIR R. My dear, in the first place you wouldn't have listened——

LADY S. [*Confidently.*] Oh, yes, I should.

SIR R. In the second place you wouldn't have heeded——

LADY S. Oh, yes, I should—if you had painted marriage in its true colours.

SIR R. It has so many true colours.

LADY S. No, it hasn't. It's a hateful, wretched institution.

SIR R. Marriage is not a hateful, wretched institution. On the contrary, after twenty-five years' constant practice in the Divorce Court, I am prepared to affirm that marriage is a perfect institution——

LADY S. What?

SIR R.——Worked by imperfect creatures. So it's like a good ship manned by a mutinous crew.

LADY S. It's men that make it what it is.

SIR R. Yes—and women. And the result is a condition that varies in each case with all the vary-

ing tastes, tempers, dispositions, infirmities, prejudices, habits, etc., etc., etc., of the contracting parties. Now you yourself are a perfect woman——

LADY S. I? perfect? I've never pretended to that.

SIR R. Well, you see, dear, that introduces one little kink into the working of the institution in your case. Still, however, as Jim Harabin is perfect——

LADY S. Jim perfect?!

SIR R. You thought him perfect at the time of your engagement, if you remember.

LADY S. Never!

SIR R. Well, you see, that introduces another little kink into the working of the institution in your case. So you saw his faults?

LADY S. Always—heaps of faults.

SIR R. Then, my dear, if that didn't stop you from marrying him, do you think it would have stopped you if I had hinted at, or even described, certain other faults? No; you would have been shocked and grieved. He would have promised amendment. And in the end you would have forgiven him. And at this precise moment we should be at the very precise point at which we have now arrived.

LADY S. Oh no! I shouldn't have forgiven him.

SIR R. Then, my dear, you'd have been on the high way to be an old maid, and at this precise moment you would have been railing at me for

having spoilt your chances. And that reminds me, while you're blaming me for letting you marry, Elaine is blaming me for trying to stop her from throwing herself away on this—what's the fool's name?—Fergusson Pybus.

LADY S. She's written to him to come to see you at once.

SIR R. What for?

LADY S. She knows there has been a misunderstanding between Jim and me, and she knows that I am leaving the house. When I've gone, of course I can't chaperon her any longer.

SIR R. And so you intend to throw her back on my hands. [*Perplexed.*] Now, my dear Sue, do be a sensible girl, and—and——

LADY S. No. You promised me you wouldn't advise me to patch it up.

SIR R. Well, will you listen to what Jim has to say?

LADY S. I have. It's no use.

SIR R. Have you thoroughly rowed him?

LADY S. Not so much as he deserves.

SIR R. No—no—but still considerably, eh? And he's thoroughly ashamed of himself?

LADY S. Not so much as he ought to be.

SIR R. No—no—but still considerably, eh? Well now [*Making a dart at the bell-handle and pulling it.*] —we'll have him up.

LADY S. [*Very decidedly.*] No. I won't meet him.

SIR R. My dear Sue, if you're going to leave him,

don't give him a chance to say that you didn't thoroughly explain your reasons for taking the step. [Footman *appears at door left.*] Will you tell Mr. Harabin I should like to see him for a minute? [*Exit* Footman.

LADY S. It's no use—[*Going off.*]

SIR R. [*Going to door left, stopping her.*] My dear Sue, let's hear what the accused has to say.

LADY S. I have heard.

SIR R. Well, perhaps there is something else.

LADY S. Yes; he has thought of some fresh excuses.

SIR R. Perhaps he's more sorry and ashamed.

LADY S. Well, what then?

SIR R. Then you'll forgive him. [LADY SUSAN *shakes her head.*] It will come to that at the last, my dear Sue. Why not spare yourself and all of us no end of trouble and anxiety, and forgive him at first?

LADY S. No! Not till I have something to be forgiven on my side.

[SIR RICHARD *shrugs his shoulders.*

Enter JAMES HARABIN, *an average English gentleman about forty, a little inclined to stoutness. He comes in hesitatingly, evidently very uncomfortable and ashamed, his eyes averted.*

SIR R. [*The moment he has entered begins very sternly.*] Now, Harabin, this is really disgraceful I haven't words to characterise your conduct. Sue

has my countenance in all she is saying and doing. Frankly, I don't counsel her to forgive you, and you'll be very lucky indeed if you can persuade her. Now what have you got to say for yourself? At least, don't try to excuse yourself. The only thing to do is to throw yourself on her mercy, and if she does forgive you, it's a thousand times more than you deserve. And let me tell you it's only one woman in a thousand who would be magnanimous enough to do it. Now!

HAR. [*Very lamely and hesitatingly.*] I know I've behaved in a very foolish and blackguardly way——

SIR R. You have. Go on.

HAR. [*Same distressed, uncomfortable manner.*] And I'm very sorry now—that——

LADY S. Now that you're found out. Yes, that is a pity.

SIR R. [*Same stern, sharp tone.*] But are you genuinely sorry—deeply, sincerely, truly, lastingly, penitent?

HAR. I am indeed.

LADY S. Of course. But can he give me any reason for his conduct—one single little reason?

SIR R. No, he can't. I'm sure he can't.

LADY S. Then I don't see any reason that I should look over it. [*Going off left.* SIR RICHARD *gets towards the door and stops her.*]

SIR R. [*To* JAMES HARABIN *very sternly.*] Can you give one single little reason for your conduct?

LADY S. Is my company unpleasant? Is my

temper bad? Has he found me flirting with anybody? Have I given him his dinners badly cooked? He must surely be able to give some shadow of a reason.

SIR R. Come, sir, you must surely be able to give some shadow of a reason.

HAR. [*Fumbling, uncomfortable.*] I must own, Sir Richard, that I can't.

SIR R. I thought not. I'm glad you have the grace to own that.

LADY S. What, no reason?

HAR. Except [*Turns to* SIR RICHARD.]—Well, Kato, you'd find it out if you were married yourself——

SIR R. Stick to the point. I'm not married. Find out what?

HAR. Well—married life, even with the best and sweetest of wives, does grow confoundedly unromantic at times.

LADY S. [*With a peal of ironic laughter.*] Unromantic! Ha! ha! ha! If it comes to romance, I think I'm rather a more romantic person to live with than you. Unromantic! Married life isn't very romantic with you, Jim.

SIR R. Married life isn't very romantic anywhere, with anybody, and it ought not to be. When it is, it gets into the Divorce Court. You ought to have finished with romance long ago, both of you.

LADY S. Jim is twelve years older than I am, so

if he hasn't finished with it, I'm twelve years to the good yet. Unromantic! Don't you think that married life grows unromantic for women? Don't you think we want our little romance as well as you? Unromantic! Ha! ha! [*She is going off again,* SIR RICHARD *again stops her.*]

SIR R. [*Stopping her and turning sternly to* JAMES HARABIN.] There, Harabin, you see what your conduct has done! See the extremities to which you are driving the best of wives. The unwomanly, unfeminine attitude you have forced her to take up——

LADY S. Unwomanly! Unfeminine!

SIR R. [*Soothingly.*] Yes, my dear, but it isn't your fault. Your language and behaviour are quite natural under the circumstances. [*Very sternly turning to* JAMES HARABIN.] Harabin! why don't you do something to repair your fault?

HAR. [*Same lame uncomfortable manner.*] I've offered to take the villa at Cannes she liked last year.

LADY S. Ha! [*Contemptuously.*]

HAR. And I have asked her to go to Hunt and Roskell's and choose something. I don't mind what I do to show my regret.

SIR R. Well, that's something. If I were Sue, I should accept the villa at Cannes and a diamond ring and bracelet from Hunt and Roskell's; not in the least as any reparation of your fault—nothing can repair that—but as a sign of belief in the

genuineness of your—your remorse. What else can you do?

HAR. Anything that you can suggest.

SIR R. You have of course absolutely broken off——?

HAR. Absolutely. I have given Sue assurances and proofs of that.

SIR R. And you promise that nothing shall ever induce you to renew the acquaintance?

HAR. I promise.

SIR R. You hear, Sue?

LADY S. Oh, yes. Of course. But will he promise that nothing of this kind shall ever happen again? [*Looking at* JAMES HARABIN.

HAR. Yes, certainly.

LADY S. Will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman that it shall never happen again? Your sacred word—Uncle Dick, listen to this!—now, sir, your sacred word of honour, your parole.

[JAMES HARABIN *is about to promise, then checks himself.*

LADY S. [*Fiercely.*] Ha! [*To* SIR RICHARD.] There! You see! I knew! He promises it shall never happen again—until the next time. [*To* JAMES HARABIN.] You needn't give your promise—I'll save you the trouble of breaking it.

[*Exit fiercely left.*

JAMES HARABIN *and* SIR RICHARD *stand and look at each other nonplussed for some moments without speaking.*

SIR R. I gave it you hot, Jim, but, upon my word, you deserve it.

HAR. I know I do.

SIR R. Why didn't you make haste and give your word of honour it shouldn't happen again?

HAR. So I should in another moment. But hang it all, Kato, I didn't like to pledge myself irrevocably—in case, you know——.

SIR R. But don't you mean it never to happen again?

HAR. Yes, of course. But, after giving my word of honour as a gentleman, I should have felt so jolly uncomfortable if it had. I say, Kato, what can I do?

SIR R. I don't know. I've done all I can to bring her round.

Enter Footman, *left, announcing* Sir Joseph Darby.

[*Enter* ADMIRAL SIR JOSEPH DARBY, *a jovial English gentleman of about sixty. Exit* Footman.

ADMIRAL. [*Very cordially.*] My dear Jim—[*Shakes hands.*] Sir Richard. Is Lady Darby here?

SIR R. She left a little while ago to meet you at Waterloo.

ADMIRAL. I've been home, and they told me she'd come here. I haven't seen her for six months, bless her heart! Well, I'll be off back. [*Going.*

SIR R. You'd better wait. She's coming back here.

ADMIRAL. Coming back here?

SIR R. Yes. The fact is, we've had a little—matrimonial upset. [*Pause.*

ADMIRAL. What's the matter, eh, Jim?

HAR. Lady Susan and I——

ADMIRAL. That's bad! That's very bad! You've been married six years. There never ought to be any quarrels after the first year.

SIR R. Or even then.

ADMIRAL. Oh, yes. I allow every married couple twelve months for what I call the shaking-down process; that is, to learn each other's tempers, to learn the give and take of married life. In all well-regulated households, for the woman to learn that she has got a master. In all ill-regulated households, for the man to learn that he has got a master. The first year of our married life Lady Darby and I lived a thorough cat and dog life. [*A roar of reminiscent laughter.*] We had a battle royal, I assure you, every day of our life. Ho! Ho! Ho! But we shook down comfortably after that—God bless her! God bless her! You're sure she's coming back here?

SIR R. Oh, yes.

ADMIRAL. [*Turning to* JAMES HARABIN.] Now, Jim, how is it the shaking-down process isn't complete in your case? What is it? Extravagance?

debts? incompatibility of temper? jealousy? She's jealous, eh?

HAR. Worse, I'm afraid, Sir Joseph, and—I regret to say I've given her only too much cause.

ADMIRAL. That's awkward, that's very awkward. So she's found you out. Well, then, you must own up like a man. And, above all, mind your p's and q's till things have shaken down again.

HAR. But she won't let things shake down.

ADMIRAL. Oh, yes, she will. That's what it always comes to. Women are noble creatures—bless 'em! bless 'em! My wife, now—I've been a sad rascal, Jim—I won't mince matters—I've been a thorough out and out rascal. [*Much affected.*] I can't forgive myself. But she's forgiven me. Ah! what angels women are! Yes, she's forgiven me freely! [*Slight pause.*] I haven't told her all. But she's forgiven me freely what I have told her. So I thought I wouldn't grieve her by telling her any more. [*Sits in his chair and ponders his past transgressions much affected.*]

Enter Footman.

FOOTMAN. [*To* SIR RICHARD.] I beg pardon, Sir Richard, Mr. Fergusson Pybus is below and would like to speak to you.

SIR R. Jim, here is this creature that is running after Elaine. Can I see him here for a few moments?

HAR. Certainly. [*To* Footman.] Show Mr. Pybus up. [*Exit* Footman.

SIR R. I've done my best to break off the match, but Elaine seems determined to have him. Why I should saddle myself with another ward when I'd already got Sue to look after, is a mystery to me.

Enter Footman *announcing* Mr. Fergusson Pybus.

Enter FERGUSSON PYBUS, *a lank, dreamy young man of twenty-five, with longish light hair, and precise, nervous, and rather affected manner. Exit* Footman.

PYBUS. How d'ye do, Sir Richard? [SIR RICHARD *gives a curt nod in return.* PYBUS *bows to* ADMIRAL, *who is seated in gloomy reflection on his pact transgressions, and takes no notice. Goes very sympathetically with timid, ingratiating manner to* JAMES HARABIN.] My dear Harabin, [*Takes* JAMES HARABIN'S *hand, holds it between both of his for a moment with an expression of the deepest sympathy.*] You have my deepest, my most heartfelt sympathy.

HAR. [*Gruffly.*] What for?

PYBUS. Miss Shrimpton has acquainted me with the regrettable fact that there is a serious misunderstanding between you and Lady Susan. [JAMES HARABIN *roughly withdraws his hand.*] I trust I am not indiscreet. [*To* ADMIRAL.] Sir Joseph Darby, I believe. [ADMIRAL *bows.*] Then I'm speaking

en famille. My dear Harabin, I can't say how much I regret this. I do not seek to know the nature of this misunderstanding—I do not ask who is to blame. There is to me in all matrimonial disagreements such a want of—of symmetry, a want of—a—proportion—of harmony—a want of beauty, so to speak. It affects me like a wrong note in music, like a—[*Descriptive gesture*] like a faulty dash of colour in a picture—it distresses me.

SIR R. Does it?

PYBUS. Woman is to me [ADMIRAL *begins to listen*] something so priceless, so perfect, so rare, so intolerably superior in every way to man, that I instinctively fall upon my knees before her.

ADMIRAL. [*In a tone of contemptuous inquiry.*] Are you married, sir?

PYBUS. [*Undecidedly.*] No—no—not at present. Now, my dear Harabin, may I offer my services as a—what shall I say?—ambassador between you and Lady Susan?

HAR. Thank you, that's not necessary.

PYBUS. I'm delighted to hear it. But I do implore you to lose no time in placing yourself in the most abject position before your offended deity. [JAMES HARABIN *looks at* PYBUS *with rather angry impatience, turns his back on him and goes up stage. Following* JAMES HARABIN *up.*] Pardon me, I have never disguised from you or Sir Richard [*Turning to* SIR RICHARD] that it is only by the constant companionship and influence of Miss Shrimpton in

the tenderest union that I can hope to gain that power over myself, that ascendency over my fellows, that—that divine afflatus which—which will, I trust, enable me to—a—to—stamp myself upon the age.

HAR. Sir Richard is Miss Shrimpton's guardian. I'll leave you to speak to him. [*Goes over to* SIR RICHARD. *In a low tone.*] What can I do about Sue?

SIR R. Try another coax.

ADMIRAL. [*Pulling out his watch.*] Are you sure, Sir Richard, that Lady Darby is coming back here?

SIR R. Oh, yes. Go up with Jim and see Sue, and get her to listen to reason.

HAR. Yes, Sir Joseph, perhaps she'll listen to you.

ADMIRAL. I can't think what's coming over women. They never used to make this fuss. I never had any nonsense of this sort with Lady Darby. She used to make things very uncomfortable for about a fortnight, and then she dropped it. Ah! what an angel my wife is!

[*Exeunt* JAMES HARABIN *and the* ADMIRAL.

PYBUS. [*To* SIR RICHARD.] I cannot tell you how an affair of this kind distresses me. It seems to me so strange, so extraordinary, so impossible, that a man and a lady, united in the tenderest bonds, with every inducement to make each other supremely happy; with nothing to offer but worship and reverence on the man's side, nothing but cour-

tesy and divine condescension on the lady's side, it seems so strange that two such beings should bicker and wrangle and bring discord into the harmony of life. Why should they do it? Why should they do it?

SIR R. Ah! why should they?

PYBUS. Sir Richard, I have already approached you with regard to—to—her——

SIR R. [*Rings bell.*] Let me see, what is your exact position?

PYBUS. I have now been her humble suitor for more than six months.

SIR R. Yes, I know. But your pecuniary position?

PYBUS. My father left me a modest annual income in consols.

Footman *appears at door left.*

SIR R. Will you ask Miss Shrimpton to come here for a few moments? [*Exit* Footman.] What is the amount of this modest annual income?

PYBUS. It is not so much the exact amount of my income as the fact that with—with her to inspire me, I feel I shall be able to—a—in some way —stamp myself upon the age.

SIR R. And is that likely to be very lucrative?

PYBUS. What?

SIR R. Stamping yourself upon the age. What's it likely to bring in?

PYBUS. [*Undecidedly.*] Well—of course—that

would depend upon the way in which I—a—stamp myself upon the age.

SIR R. Just so. It seems a trifle problematic. So I'm afraid we must come back to the precise amount of this modest annual income. How much?

PYBUS. Well—a—it is a capitalised sum of—a—ten thousand pounds.

SIR R. Bringing in an annual income of two hundred and seventy-five pounds. Miss Shrimpton's fortune is—perhaps you know the amount?

PYBUS. I do not seek to know. There is something inexpressibly repulsive to me in the bare idea of receiving money with Elaine. It seems like a crime. I want my wife to be a fairy creature, incessantly, perpetually, a fairy creature.

SIR R. [*Dryly.*] Ah!

PYBUS. I should wish her to come to me penniless, shoeless, without even rags——

Enter ELAINE SHRIMPTON, *a raw, self-assertive modern young lady, with brusque and decided manner.* PYBUS *assumes an attitude of devotion, props his head upon his hand, sighs, and worships her from afar.*

ELAINE. How d'ye do, Sir Richard? Fergusson has told you of our decision?

[*Looking inquiringly at* PYBUS.

PYBUS. [*Nervously.*] I have hinted to Sir Richard that—— [*Leaves off nervously.*

ELAINE. In a few months I shall be twenty-one. I find I cannot stay any longer with Lady Susan, so I wish to know definitely if you will give your consent to our immediate marriage.

PYBUS. [*Same nervous, timid, deprecating manner.*] Of course—we should wish to be guided by your advice, Sir Richard—that is—if——

SIR R. That is, if my advice concides with your own wishes.

PYBUS. Yes; and even if it did not, we should at least—a—a——

SIR R. You would at least listen to it. Thank you.

ELAINE. [*Very decidedly.*] At the same time we feel that we have duties and responsibilities that we shall allow no worm-eaten conventionalities of society to interfere with.

PYBUS. I feel that it is only by the—a—the—a—constant stimulus and charm of her presence that I can—a—[*Musingly, looking at her devotedly.*] Ye—es—Ye—es——

ELAINE. Fergusson has a career before him; I, too, have a career before me. Why should we blind our eyes to the plainest and most sacred duties that lie before us—our duties to ourselves?

SIR R. [*Trying to get a word in.*] Well—I——

ELAINE. [*Stopping him.*] Why should we check the natural, self-ordained, self-consecrated development of our characters?

SIR R. Well——

ELAINE. Why should we dwarf and stunt ourselves physically, morally, intellectually, for the sake of propping up a society that is decrepit and moribund to its core? Why should we?

SIR R. I wouldn't if I were you.

PYBUS. I trust you don't think, Sir Richard, that we are taking up this attitude in any disrespect to you as Elaine's guardian.

SIR R. No, but——

ELAINE. [*Stopping him.*] We have thoroughly sifted the matter, and we are prepared to argue it out point by point, and step by step, from beginning to end, if you wish to discuss it.

SIR R. Not at all, thank you.

ELAINE. Then, as you have nothing to say——

SIR R. Excuse me, as I'm your guardian, and as I have the command of your fortune until you're twenty-five, I have just a word or two to say.

ELAINE. [*Resigns herself in a bored attitude.*] Well?

SIR R. In the first place I should advise you not to marry. [ELAINE *suddenly turns round on him.*] At least, not at present.

ELAINE. I thought we had already dismissed that point as settled, eh, Fergusson?

PYBUS. Ye—es—I really thought—I assure you, Sir Richard, we value your advice immensely, immensely—but——

SIR R. But you won't take it. Very well, we'll

consider that point settled. You marry as soon as Elaine's twenty-one.

PYBUS. And I assure you when we find ourselves in any difficulty we shall always come to you, sha'n't we, Elaine?

ELAINE. We are scarcely likely to find ourselves in any difficulty where our own good sense will not be an ample guide.

PYBUS. No, no! but if we do we'll come to you, Sir Richard.

SIR R. Thank you. Well, we'll consider you married. Mr. Pybus, you have an annual income of two hundred and seventy-five pounds. I shall allow Elaine precisely the same sum annually until she is twenty-five.

ELAINE. What? You will hold back my money! It's cowardly! But so like a man! Brute force! —brute force!—never anything but brute force! Never any other argument!

SIR R. My dear Elaine, an allowance of two hundred and seventy-five pounds a year——

ELAINE. [*Taking him up quickly.*] Is at bottom, when you analyse it, nothing more or less than an exhibition of brute force. What else is it?—Analyse it.

SIR R. [*Very calm.*] Thank you, no! We'll adopt the synthetic method, and call it brute force. Well, that point's settled. I think that's all. I had a little advice to bestow.

ELAINE. Advice? Well, go on.

SIR R. On second thoughts I really feel I'm taking a mean advantage of my age and experience.

ELAINE. No—no. We'll hear what you have to say.

PYBUS. I assure you, Sir Richard, that although we haven't adopted your advice we have the highest opinion of it.

SIR R. Thank you. [*They both assume a bored expression, half supercilious, half benevolent.*] I hope you won't mind my telling you, Mr. Pybus, that Elaine is a rather ignorant, impulsive girl, with a smattering of pseudo-scientific knowledge, chiefly picked up from unwholesome feminine novels. [ELAINE *looks defiant.* PYBUS *coughs, a bored, distressed, supercilious, remonstrative cough.* SIR RICHARD, *taking no notice, continues.*] If you want to be happy with her, you'll put her with some good housewife for a few months; where she will gain some rudimentary knowledge of housekeeping, and learn those little arts which are necessary to make a home comfortable on an income of five hundred and fifty pounds a year. A few cooking lessons might not be out of place. [ELAINE *throws up her arms with a gesture of contemptuous despair at* SIR RICHARD'S *stupidity.* PYBUS *exchanges glances with her, and coughs and fidgets.* SIR RICHARD, *taking no notice, continues.*] And I hope you won't mind my telling you, Elaine, that Mr. Pybus, although doubtless a very clever and talented man——

[PYBUS *coughs his cough.*

ELAINE. Fergusson is a genius, if ever there was a genius on this earth!

SIR R. [*Same calm tone.*] I've no doubt! I've no doubt! And I'm sure he will stamp himself upon the age in some highly interesting and original way. [PYBUS *coughs again.*] I should advise him to choose the most lucrative, and stick to that.

[PYBUS *again coughs with more pity and contempt.*

ELAINE. Have you anything more to say?

SIR R. So much for you individually. For the pair of you, as a mere matter of duty, and quite in a perfunctory way, without expecting you to pay the least attention to what I am saying, let me assure you that you'll find marriage a very trying and difficult position, full of cares and anxieties, that this romantic attachment of yours will probably wear away before long— [*Incredulous protestation on the part of both.*] And then you will have to face the coarse and brutal bread and cheese realities of life. You'll find that you have tempers to train and subdue, whims and obstinacies of your own to check, whims and obstinacies of your partner to indulge. There will be the need of daily, hourly, forbearance and kindliness, a constant overlooking of each other's faults and imperfections. And if towards the close of your married life you can look back upon it, not indeed without regrets, but without remorse, and on the whole with

pleasure and thankfulness, it will only be because you have shut your eyes to much, forgiven much, and utterly forgotten a good deal more.

ELAINE. Sir Richard, you're talking about wha you have absolutely no experience of.

SIR R. [*Rather angrily.*] No experience?

ELAINE. You have never been married. [SIR RICHARD *makes an impatient gesture.*] And why do you advise us?

SIR R. [*Hurriedly.*] I don't! I don't! Kindly let me know when you have fixed the date of your marriage, and if I can be of the least use in any possible way, pray command me.

[*Exit.*

ELAINE. [*Looking after him.*] Sir Richard grows more brutally cynical every day. And to refuse me my money!

PYBUS. My dear Elaine, let us at the very outset of our married life make it a rule to avoid all that is mean and petty and commonplace in life. What I want you to do, my dearest, is to surround me with—[*Descriptive gesture.*]—with all that is sweet and dainty and graceful and beautiful. Do you understand, my darling?

ELAINE. [*Dubiously.*] Ye—es.

PYBUS. To create a lovely lonely world for me to dwell in, so that I may be able to bring all my powers to their full fruition. Do you see, my dearest?

ELAINE. Yes, dearest. We will help each other. I feel, too, that I have a message for this age.

PYBUS. Ye—es. Ye—es. Still, I think, darling, it would be more profitable—I don't use the word in a pecuniary sense—if you were chiefly to devote yourself to—as I say—[*Descriptive gesture.*]—as it were—do you see, dear ?

ELAINE. Oh, yes. But still, of course, I shall be free to develop my own character.

PYBUS. Of course, dearest, of course. Still, I think——

ADMIRAL *enters right, very excited, and hurriedly.*

ADMIRAL. Excuse me, I've just seen Lady Darby drive up in a cab.

Enter Footman *showing in* LADY DARBY *left. Exit* Footman.

ADMIRAL. My dear girl——

[*Embracing her very effusively.*

LADY D. My dear Jo——

[PYBUS *coughs and seems uncomfortable.*

ADMIRAL. [*Glancing at him and speaking very sternly.*] I have not seen Lady Darby for some months, sir. [*Takes* LADY DARBY *up stage.*

PYBUS. [*To* ELAINE.] Come, dearest, we will go into the morning room. I do not like these coarse manifestations of affection.

[*Exeunt* PYBUS *and* ELAINE.

ADMIRAL. My darling girl, [*Looks at her with great admiration.*] how well you're looking! Upon my word, Victoria, you're worth forty bread-and-butter misses! You are! Now, come, sit down, my dear; tell me all the news.

Enter Footman *showing in* INEZ. ADMIRAL *shows great impatience.*

INEZ. How d'ye do, Sir Joseph?

ADMIRAL. How d'ye do?

[*Beckons* LADY DARBY *to get her away.*

Re-enter SIR RICHARD *right, very downcast.*

INEZ. Well, Sir Richard?

SIR R. [*Shakes his head.*] Sue is determined to leave him.

INEZ. What's to be done?

SIR R. Nothing, except give her her head till she comes round.

LADY D. We must keep people from knowing it; and, above all, we must keep it out of the papers. What can we do?

[*Sits down and begins to write hurriedly.*

SIR R. Mrs. Quesnel, since there's no help for it, will you take care of her for a few weeks, and bring her round to a sensible frame of mind?

INEZ. Of course, anything that I can do——

Re-enter LADY SUSAN, *apparently in very bright spirits, dressed as for a journey, followed by* Maid *with parcels and bandboxes.*

LADY S. Now, Inez, I'm ready. Is your carriage outside?

INEZ. [*Doubtfully.*] Ye—es, but——

LADY S. [*To* Maid.] Phillips, put them in Mrs. Quesnel's carriage, and come back and bring the rest of my luggage.

[*Exit* Maid *left, with bandboxes and parcels.*

LADY S. Good-bye, Uncle Jo! [*Kissing the* ADMIRAL.] Good-bye, Uncle Dick! [*Kissing him.*] Good-bye, auntie!

LADY D. You foolish woman!

LADY S. What are you writing?

LADY D. [*Reads.*] "Lady Susan Harabin, whose health has been in a very delicate state for some time past, has left for Egypt with Mrs. Quesnel."

JAMES HARABIN *enters, looking half wretched and half defiant.*

LADY D. [*Continuing to read.*] "Mr. James Harabin has gone to Yorkshire for a few weeks' shooting before rejoining Lady Susan."

LADY S. [*Shrugs her shoulders.*] I've said good-bye to everybody, haven't I?

HAR. [*Sternly.*]You have not said good-bye to me, madam.

LADY S. [*With great politeness.*] Good-bye, my dear sir. Come, Inez.

[INEZ *a little protests.* LADY SUSAN *gently pushes her off left, is going after her.*

HAR. [*Trying to assume a tone of stern authority.*] Where are you going, madam?

LADY S. [*Same tone of extremely calm politeness.*] I am going to find a little romance, and introduce it into our married life. [*Going off.*

HAR. [*Loud, angry.*] I forbid you, madam! I forbid you.

[LADY SUSAN, *in the most graceful, calm, and polite way, snaps her fingers three times at him, each time with a larger action, then backs out door left, bowing profoundly and politely to him.* JAMES HARABIN *makes an angry dash after her, realises he is powerless, stops, stands in a state of helpless, pathetic bewilderment for a few moments, then turns and appeals in turn for sympathy to* LADY DARBY, *who slowly and sympathetically shakes her head and sighs deeply; to the* ADMIRAL, *who purses his lips and pulls a long face; to* SIR RICHARD, *who shrugs his shoulders.* JAMES HARABIN *stands helpless.*

A very slow curtain.

(*Ten months pass between Acts* 1 *and* 2).

ACT II.

SCENE. SIR RICHARD KATO'S *sitting-room at the St. Mildred's Hotel, Westbay, a comfortable room in a good-class seaside hotel. A door right. A large window, left, opening upon balcony and giving exit to gardens. Discover* SIR RICHARD *writing at table.*

Enter Waiter, *showing in* INEZ. *Exit* Waiter.

SIR RICHARD. [*Rising, shaking hands very cordially.*] My dear Mrs. Quesnel!

INEZ. What has brought you to Westbay, Sir Richard?

SIR R. An appeal from Elaine, who seems to have made a bad start in matrimony——

INEZ. Oh yes, she and Mr. Pybus are down here in separate apartments——

SIR R. My wish to see my young friend Lucien, my wish to see Sue, my wish to see you,—first of all, how is Sue?

INEZ. In the rudest health. We've had a glorious time.

SIR R. You've been away from England ten months. Weren't you and Sue getting a little home-sick, eh?

INEZ. [*Meditating.*] N—o, n—o. I don't think so.

SIR R. I'm sorry. Tell me everything about Sue.

INEZ. I've told you everything in my letters.

SIR R. Yes, but what are her feelings towards her husband?

INEZ. I haven't the key of her heart.

SIR R. But so far as you can judge?

INEZ. So far as I can judge, Sue is in a state of the most perfect indifference towards every man alive. But that is the attitude which you men force us to assume to you, to ourselves, to everybody except the one man alive.

SIR R. But there is no *one-man-alive* in Sue's case?

INEZ. Not that I know of. But don't trust either my eyesight or my penetration, because——

SIR R. Because?

INEZ. Because if I were in Sue's place I should take good care that nobody knew. And I credit Sue with the common or garden powers of deception. [SIR RICHARD *walks about, a little perplexed and uncomfortable.*

INEZ. It's charming of me to give away my sex to you like this, isn't it?

SIR R. It is. I assure you I appreciate it. After a lifetime's practice in the Divorce Court I still feel myself like Newton, a mere child on the seashore, with all the boundless ocean of woman's mysterious nature stretching silent, and innavigable, and inexplorable before me.

INEZ. Perhaps the Divorce Court isn't the best

place to learn what unsuspected depths and treasures there are in woman's nature. .

SIR R. [*Very winning and confidential.*] Well, now tell me—I'm only asking in the purest spirit of scientific inquiry—are there any depths and treasures which we mere outsiders, men, never suspect?

INEZ. Shall I tell you? Yes, treasures of faithfulness, treasures of devotion, of self-sacrifice, of courage, of comradeship, of loyalty. And above all, treasures of deceit,—loving honourable deceit, and secrecy and treachery.

SIR R. I had already suspected there might be an occasional jewel of that sort in the dark, unfathomed caves.

INEZ. You're laughing at me. You men never will see anything but a comedy in it. So we have to dress up our tragedy as a comedy just to save ourselves from being ridiculous and boring you. But we women feel it is a tragedy all the same.

SIR R. [*With real feeling.*] Surely you have no tragedy in your life?

INEZ. I? [*Laughs.*] Oh! dear no. And you? [*Very searchingly.*

SIR R. I? Oh! dear no. [*Pause—a shadow of recollection crosses his face.*] None that I cannot hide, or, better still, laugh at.

INEZ. Ah, that's it! Our own hearts aren't sacred to us. That's our real modern tragedy—we laugh at the tragedy of our own lives!

SIR R. No, no, that's our real modern comedy and our truest wisdom. [INEZ *shakes her head.*] Yes, yes, believe me, it is so. We'll keep on dressing it up as a comedy for fear of boring people and making ourselves ridiculous. To come back to Sue——

INEZ. Where's Mr. Harabin?

SIR R. You'll keep my secret?

INEZ. Honour!

SIR R. On his way here.

INEZ. On his way here?

SIR R. [*Nods.*] Sir Joseph and Lady Darby are bringing him. I came last evening to reconnoitre, but I didn't get in till midnight. Now, can't you and I, like good Samaritans, pour in wine and oil upon the wound?

INEZ. I'm always pouring in oil, but Sue doesn't seem to trouble very much about the wound.

SIR R. You don't rub it in. Not enough elbow-grease, eh?

INEZ. Perhaps. It's very absurd to make a fuss about other people's love affairs.

SIR R. But when a husband and wife have quarrelled——?

INEZ. Then it's clearly one's duty to advise them to make it up. And one does it, the same as one goes to church, because it is one's duty, not because there's any result from it.

SIR R. [*Takes out watch.*] You'd better send Sue to me, but don't tell her that Harabin is coming.

Enter Waiter. *Brings card to* SIR RICHARD.

SIR R. Where are you staying?

INEZ. Seven, Marine Gardens—it's just opposite.
[*Going towards window.*

SIR R. [*To* Waiter.] Show Mr. Edensor in.
[*Exit* Waiter.

INEZ. Edensor? There was a Mr. Edensor staying at the hotel at Cairo last year.

SIR R. This is Lucien Edensor.

INEZ. It must be the same.

SIR R. He's the son of my old friend Danby Edensor. His father died in India last year, and I've got him a government appointment in New Zealand. He wrote to me from Eastgate, so I asked him to come over and see me. Do you know him?

INEZ. Very slightly, only a *table d'hôte* acquaintance. This is my nearest way. I'll send Sue to you. [*Exit at balcony.*

Enter Waiter *announcing* Mr. Lucien Edensor.

Enter LUCIEN EDENSOR, *a handsome young man about twenty-five. Exit* Waiter.

SIR R. [*Coming down from balcony.*] Ah, my dear boy. [*Shaking hands very warmly.*

LUCIEN. Sir Richard, how can I thank you?

SIR R. By saying nothing at all about it, and proving that you are the right man for the post.

LUCIEN. I shall do all I can to justify your recommendation.

SIR R. I'm sure you will. When do you start?

LUCIEN. Next Thursday.

SIR R. It will be a wrench to leave England for so many years?

LUCIEN. I'm rather glad of it. The truth is, Sir Richard, I'm awfully down in the mouth.

SIR R. What's the matter? A woman? [LUCIEN *nods.*] Poor boy! Ah well, at your age you'll get over that.

LUCIEN. I shall never get over it.

SIR R. That's what we all say at twenty-five, and it does credit to our youthful innocence.

LUCIEN. I shall never forget her.

SIR R. No; but you'll wonder what on earth you could have seen in her to rave about.

LUCIEN. You don't know how I love her.

SIR R. Yes I do, my boy. I've been twenty-five. I've had my illusions. At twenty-five you have the delight of your illusions, and you laugh at the fogies. But at fifty you'll have the far greater delight of seeing through your illusions and laughing at the youngsters. Take my word for it, fifty is the age when a healthy man begins to enjoy life.

LUCIEN. [*Bitterly.*] And when instead of loving a woman with all his heart he can laugh at her!

SIR R. No, no! when he can love her and laugh at her too. When he can love 'em all very much

more, and when, damn 'em, they can plague him very much less.

LUCIEN. I shall never love but this one woman as long as I live.

SIR R. So you say! So you say!

LUCIEN. [*Rather angrily.*] You don't believe me?

SIR R. My dear Lucien, I bought all there was of your father's very excellent Madeira. To-day is the fifth of September. Write to me every fifth of September and say, "On my honour, I love her still," and on *my* honour I'll send you half-a-dozen bottles of that excellent Madeira every year. Is it a bargain?

LUCIEN. Yes. [*Shakes hands, suddenly remembers.*] There were only two dozen of that Madeira left! It won't last out!

SIR R. My boy, it will last out your love.

LUCIEN. Sir Richard, when you talk like that, I feel, in spite of all you have done for me, I feel I—I almost hate you. I love her, and if my love is an illusion I hope I shall die in it!

SIR R. [*With a change in manner, very softly and tenderly.*] You're right. [*Long sigh.*] Love her, my dear boy, love her as long as you can.

LUCIEN. Do you say that, Sir Richard? even if——

SIR R. If what?

LUCIEN. If she's the wife of another man.

SIR R. The devil! No!

LUCIEN. I can't help it. I must keep on loving her.

SIR R. Very well then, keep on loving her. But pack off to New Zealand next Thursday. Now let's drop her. You'll want the agreement and the letter of instructions. They're upstairs.

[*He is going to door when enter* Waiter *showing in* LADY SUSAN. LUCIEN *starts a little, unnoticed by* SIR RICHARD. *Exit* Waiter.

LADY S. [*Begins very affectionately.*] My dear Uncle Dick! [*Sees* LUCIEN, *starts rather violently.* SIR RICHARD *sees her confusion.* LUCIEN, *behind* SIR RICHARD'S *back, makes her a sign of warning.*] You have a visitor.

SIR R. You know Mr. Edensor?

LADY S. [*Who has a little recovered.*] No.

SIR R. Then let me introduce you. Mr. Lucien Edensor, Lady Susan Harabin.

LADY S. I thought at first that I had met you, but——

LUCIEN. I don't think I've had the pleasure.

[*An awkward little pause.*

SIR R. I'll fetch those instructions, Lucien.

[*He turns suddenly at door, sees they are both watching him furtively. Exit* SIR RICHARD. *They watch him off. The moment he has left the room they turn to each other.*

LADY S. [*Pleased, excited, frightened.*] Lucien!

LUCIEN. Lady Sue!

LADY S. [*Alarmed.*] We haven't—betrayed ourselves?

LUCIEN. No—I don't think so.

LADY S. What brings you here? Why didn't you let me know you were coming? Why haven't you sent me a message all these months?

LUCIEN. You said I was not to write

LADY S. [*Reproachfully.*] And you obeyed me!

LUCIEN. When my father died Sir Richard was such a brick to me I felt I couldn't behave like a blackguard and bring disgrace to his family. But now I've seen you again——

[*Trying to clasp her.*

LADY S. [*Repulsing him.*] Hush! We shall be heard! What can we do?

LUCIEN. Go back to the old sweet days of last year; let it all be as it was then. That last Sunday at Cairo——

LADY S. [*Frightened, looking round.*] Hush! You're sure nobody suspected.

LUCIEN. How could they? We were always so careful.

LADY S. Oh, I should kill myself if any one knew! You have never spoken of me—boasted to any of your men friends——?

LUCIEN. Lady Susan, I'm not a cad.

LADY S. Forgive me, I know you wouldn't—and you never will?

LUCIEN. Be sure you will never be [*looking at her with great intentness*] *misjudged* through me.

LADY S. Thank you. No one will ever guess——

LUCIEN. No one shall ever guess *what—never—happened.*

[*She looks at him very gratefully and affectionately, presses his hand with great gratitude.*

LADY S. Thank you! Thank you! Shush!

Enter SIR RICHARD *with papers in his hands. Throughout the act his outward demeanour to the persons on the stage is that of great frankness and entire absence of suspicion, but whenever the business of the stage allows it, he shows to audience that he is most keenly watching every word, movement, and glance of* LADY SUSAN, INEZ, *and* LUCIEN.

SIR R. Lucien, my boy, you'll stay to lunch with us?

LUCIEN. Yes. No, I don't think—at least—[*glances at* LADY SUSAN.]

SIR R. Oh, I insist. I've brought the agreement and instructions. You'll have time to study them carefully on your way out to New Zealand.

LADY S. New Zealand?

LUCIEN. I'm leaving for New Zealand next Thursday.

LADY S. For long?

LUCIEN. For some years, perhaps for life.

LADY S. Indeed!

SIR R. You had better take these——

[*Is about to cross and give papers to* LUCIEN, *when* Waiter *enters, showing in* INEZ.

INEZ. *Exit* Waiter. SIR RICHARD *watches very closely to see if* INEZ *and* LUCIEN *recognise each other.* INEZ *slightly bows to* LUCIEN. LUCIEN *returns it in same unembarrassed manner.*

SIR R. [*Papers still in hand, to* INEZ.] Didn't you say that Mr. Edensor was staying at your hotel at Cairo last year?

INEZ [*Quite frankly.*] Yes. [*To* LUCIEN.] If you remember, we used to sit opposite to you at *table d'hôte.*

LADY S. [*Suddenly, a little overdoing it.*] Of course! I could not imagine where I had met Mr. Edensor. Now I remember quite well!

[SIR RICHARD *turns and looks at her.*

LUCIEN. [*A little lamely.*] Yes, but really it had escaped me. [SIR RICHARD *turns and looks at him.*]

SIR R. Very natural. Well, you'll sit opposite to each other again at lunch with me to-day. [*Giving papers.*] Take these into the smoking-room and look through them. Wait for me there.

LUCIEN. [*Has taken papers, to* INEZ.] Then I shall meet you again at lunch.

SIR R. Yes, you'll meet her again at lunch.

[*Exit* LUCIEN.

My dear Sue, welcome to England! I'm delighted to see you. Quite well and happy, eh?

[*Looks at her.*

LADY S. Quite well, and *perfectly* happy.

SIR R. [*Between her and* INEZ.] That's right. So you didn't remember Lucien? [*In a tone of affected carelessness, the tone of a skilful cross-examiner who is leading his witness unsuspectingly on.*]

LADY S. Yes, I did, but I could *not* recall where it was I had met him.

SIR R. [*Turning to* INEZ.] *You* remembered him at once?

INEZ. [*Very frankly.*] Oh, yes. He sat almost opposite to us at *table d'hôte* for a month. Then he was called away suddenly to India to his father, who was dying.

LADY S. Was he? I'd forgotten.

[SIR RICHARD *watches the following scene unobtrusively, but most intently.*

INEZ. My dear Sue, where is your memory? Nearly every one in the hotel went to see him off at the——

LADY S. I'm sure I didn't.

INEZ. Everybody except you. That was the Monday night. And on the Sunday night, if you recollect——

LADY S. [*Very quickly and pettishly.*] My dear Inez, you seem strangely interested in this young fellow.

INEZ. I seem interested! I scarcely spoke to him.

LADY S. Neither did I.

INEZ. At any rate, you were at church with him on the Sunday night.

LADY S. [*Confused.*] I'm sure I—who told you that?

INEZ. You told me you were going to church on the Sunday evening. I stayed at home. Did you go?

LADY S. [*Confused.*] Did I? Let me think—Yes, yes, I did.

INEZ. After dinner Mr. Edensor came into the drawing-room. Mrs. Grantham asked him where he'd been. He said, "To church." She said, "Isn't it very late?" He said, "The sermon was a very long one." You hadn't come in. I asked him if he had seen you at church, and he said, "Yes, you sat in the next pew to him." When I got upstairs you had just come in. I said, "You're very late." You said, "The sermon was a very long one," and——

LADY S. Oh, my dear Inez, it was an awful, awful, awful sermon. It was just as boring as this rigmarole of yours. Now do, please, stop, and let us finish with this terrible young fellow.

INEZ. [*A little angry.*] My dear Sue, the young fellow is no concern of mine.

LADY S. And I'm sure he's none of mine.

INEZ. [*A little nettled.*] I didn't say he was.

LADY S. Then why do you wish to make out that we went to church together?

INEZ. My dear Sue, why do you make such a fuss about it?

SIR R. [*Interposing, soothing them down.*] Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! My dear Mrs. Quesnel, you're making a mountain out of a molehill. Sue went to church, as I understand, this particular Sunday night. Eh, Sue?

[INEZ *begins to watch very intently.*

LADY S. Yes.

SIR R. And by the merest chance Mr. Edensor went to the same church?

LADY S. Yes.

SIR R. You neither went with him nor came back with him?

LADY S. [*Hesitates a little.*] N—o.

SIR R. But by the merest chance he happened to sit in the same pew with you?

LADY S. Yes. No. I'm not sure. I can't remember.

INEZ. It was the next pew, at least so Mr. Edensor said.

LADY S. Yes, the next pew. I remember now. It was the next pew. [*Getting more and more confused.*] He sat on this side—no, on this—no—I—[*Meets* SIR RICHARD'S *look.*] I forget, and there's an end of it. [*Goes up to balcony in a temper, stands there with her back to* SIR RICHARD *and* INEZ.]

[*Enter* Waiter *with cards on tray, hands them to* SIR RICHARD. SIR R. *takes cards, looks at* LADY SUSAN, *whose back is to him, shows them to* INEZ.

INEZ. [*In a low voice to him.*] Mr. Harabin!

SIR R. [*Cautiously.*] Shush! don't tell her. [*To* Waiter.] I'll come and speak to them.

[*Exit* Waiter. *Exit* SIR RICHARD.

LADY S. [*To* INEZ.] Inez, it's mean of you to spread such stories about me. I thought you were my friend.

INEZ. So I am, dearest. Sue, if you have been—foolish——

LADY S. Foolish?

INEZ. With this Mr. Edensor——

LADY S. [*Very indignant.*] Inez!

INEZ. Dearest, I said "if." You know, dear, you may rely upon me. I'll say anything to help you——

LADY S. [*Dignified innocent tone.*] Thank you. If you will only say the simple truth, that will be quite sufficient to clear my conduct of all suspicion. [*Suddenly eagerly.*] You never saw anything to lead you to suppose——

INEZ. No, not at the time. The idea never came to me till this moment. Then there was nothing between you, dearest? [*Very searchingly.*]

LADY S. [*Emphatically.*] No, not even so much as an innocent flirtation. You know, Inez, if

there were I should tell you. I tell you everything.

INEZ. Do you?

LADY S. Yes. And you tell me everything, don't you, dearest?

INEZ. Yes, dearest, everything [*Kisses her.*

Re-enter SIR RICHARD.

SIR R. You'll stay to lunch, Sue? I'm going to have quite a pleasant little party.

LADY S. Who's coming?

SIR R. Isn't there one very old friend, and a dear good fellow, whom you would be pleased to meet again?

LADY S. My husband! Uncle Dick, how can you insult me by asking me to meet my husband?

SIR R. My dear Sue, why shouldn't you meet your husband?

LADY S. Because—because it's impossible.

SIR R. Why? You haven't carried out your threat?

LADY S. What threat?

SIR R. To introduce a little romance into your married life.

LADY S. [*With the greatest indignation.*] Uncle Dick!

SIR R. But you threatened——

LADY S. Threatened! What else can we poor women do? Oh! and you could believe that I could

be guilty of—[*Horror-stricken.*] Oh! oh! Will men never understand a woman?

[*Exit very indignantly at balcony.* SIR RICHARD *and* INEZ *look at each other nonplussed.*

INEZ. Our oil doesn't seem to be lubricating.

SIR R. Mrs. Quesnel, honour—[*Inez gives him her hand.*] Was there anything between Sue and young Edensor at Cairo?

INEZ. On my honour, I believe no.

Enter Waiter *at door.*

WAITER. Mr. and Mrs. Fergusson Pybus are here and would like to see you, Sir Richard.

SIR R. Show them in. And let me know when Sir Joseph Darby and Mr. Harabin return.

[*Exit* Waiter.

INEZ. What's to be done about Sue?

SIR R. More oil. A constant gentle application. [*Strokes the back of her hand.*] Go and soothe her down and bring her over to lunch if you can.

INEZ. If we don't succeed what a lot of oil we shall have wasted! [*Exit at balcony.*

[SIR RICHARD, *left alone for some moments, walks up and down room very perplexed, indicating that he is putting together the links of a chain of evidence, and puzzling them out in his own mind, walks, stops suddenly, slightly scratches his forehead,*

puts one forefinger on the other, puts head on one side, walks again, puzzles.

Enter Waiter, *announces* Mr. *and* Mrs. Pybus.

Enter ELAINE *and* PYBUS *slowly and a little sulkily, as if on bad terms with each other. Exit* Waiter.

SIR R. [*Cordially.*] Well? [*Shaking hands with each of them.*] Well? [*Looking from one to the other.*] What's the matter? Nothing serious, I hope?

PYBUS. We told you, Sir Richard, that we should come to you if any difficulty arose.

SIR R. Thank you. [*To him.*] Sit down. [*To her.*] Sit down.

[*They sit down one on each side of him.*

SIR R. [*Genially.*] Now tell me all about it.

[*During the following scene* SIR RICHARD *is quietly seated between the two. He does not interfere in the least, but merely turns his head from one to the other as each begins to speak.*

ELAINE. The whole thing is in a nutshell. Is the mistress of the house to be consulted on a purely domestic arrangement, or is she not? Is she to be treated as a rational creature, or is she not?

PYBUS. My darling, I have always wished to treat you as something entirely sweet and perfect and gracious; something sainted and apart; but

when you insist on getting on a chair and breaking the looking-glass—you do make it a little difficult, my darling, for me to—to—[*Descriptive gesture.*]—to cherish my ideal of you.

ELAINE. It was your pushing that broke the looking-glass.

PYBUS. My darling, I was quite gentle. I merely held the corner of the dressing-table in a firm position while you struggled.

ELAINE. Just so. You merely asserted your superior brute force. Brute force! Brute force! When will Woman hear any other argument from Man?

PYBUS. My dear Elaine, I did argue with you for nearly three-quarters of an hour. I explained how impossible it is for me to—to concentrate myself, to bring all my manifold powers to bear upon the problems of this age while you are shaking the washing-stand, and letting the breakfast get quite cold merely for the sake of indulging your own whims.

ELAINE. Whims? I have no whims. I have only convictions.

PYBUS. My dear Elaine, what is it but a whim when you——

ELAINE. Really, Fergusson, it is impossible——

[*Rising angrily.*

PYBUS. [*Also rising angrily.*] Really, my darling, I cannot——

SIR R. [*Interposing, soothes them down.*] Tsch!

Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Sit down. Sit down, both of you. [*Motioning them into their chairs again.*] Sit down. There is to me in all matrimonial disagreements a want of harmony, a want of beauty, so to speak, which I am quite sure, Mr. Pybus, must be as distressing to you as it is to me.

PYBUS. That is what I am always explaining to Elaine. We made it a rule when we were married to avoid all that is petty and mean and commonplace in life.

SIR R. [*Soothingly.*] An excellent rule. It ought to be incorporated in the marriage service [*Throughout the scene he assumes a perfectly calm and judicial bearing.*] Well now. You were married on the second of February. After your honeymoon, you took up your residence at——

PYBUS. At Clapham.

SIR R. At Clapham. You made it a rule to avoid all that is mean and petty and commonplace in life, and you took up your residence at Clapham. I forget the exact address?

PYBUS. "The Nest," Gladstone Road, Clapham.

SIR R. "The Nest," Gladstone Road, Clapham.

PYBUS. [*Plaintively.*] I cannot say that Clapham appeals to me.

ELAINE. Clapham is intolerably suburban. The inhabitants of Clapham are entirely conventional persons. They do not live in the realm of ideas at all. And Fergusson will not join me in rousing——

PYBUS. [*Interrupting her.*] My angel, I do think

it is of more importance that you should—[*Ends with a feeble descriptive gesture.*]

ELAINE. And I think that it is of more importance that you should assist me in organising my society.

PYBUS. I cannot see, my dear——

ELAINE. [*Stopping him.*] No, Fergusson, you cannot see. That is the difficulty with men. They cannot see.

PYBUS. Really, my darling—[*Rising again angrily.*]

ELAINE. Really——

SIR R. [*Soothing them down.*] Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! [*Gets them seated again. To* ELAINE.] What is this society you are organising?

ELAINE. The Clapham Boadicean Society for the Inculcation of the New Morality among the Women of Clapham.

SIR R. What is the New Morality? Has it anything to do with the Ten Commandments?

ELAINE. It is not based precisely upon those lines. [*Beginning oratorically.*] There is an immense future for Woman——

SIR R. [*Hurriedly stopping her.*] I'm sure there is! I'm sure there is! But we must not discuss the future of woman just now. Well now, you agree upon one thing. You both dislike Clapham.

ELAINE. It is your unwarranted retention of my fortune, Sir Richard, that——

SIR R. [*Interrupts, stopping her.*] Yes, yes,—we must not discuss my conduct just now.

ELAINE. But it is your conduct that compels us to exist in a jerry-built villa, in a wretched suburb surrounded by suburban persons with entirely suburban ideas——

SIR R. My dear Elaine, we must not discuss Clapham just now. [*Taking out watch.*] I want to hear the history of this unfortunate disagreement between you and Mr. Pybus.

ELAINE. But it all arises from living in Clapham.

SIR R. Oh! I thought you said it was a purely domestic affair.

ELAINE. So it is. We live in Gladstone Road, Clapham.

SIR R. But how does that produce disagreements between you and Mr. Pybus?

PYBUS. I am of an intensely nervous and artistic temperament, and I cannot shave in the morning unless the blind is fully drawn up so that I can perceive, with the utmost nicety, the exact position of any pimple—otherwise I cut myself.

ELAINE. But it is very inconvenient that the blind should be drawn up, because of the neighbours in the rooms of the opposite house.

PYBUS. I am sure Sir Richard will agree that it is highly desirable that the blind should be drawn up.

SIR R. [*Judicially.*] It is highly desirable, Mr. Pybus, that you should not cut yourself while shaving.

PYBUS. [*To* ELAINE, *triumphantly.*] There!

ELAINE. But if the blind is drawn up, the people in the opposite house——

SIR R. It is highly desirable that the good folks who live in Clapham should not be shocked.

ELAINE. [*Triumphantly to* PYBUS.] There! And every morning Fergusson will insist——

PYBUS. My dear, it is you who will insist. And really ——

SIR R. Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch!

PYBUS. [*Plaintively.*] It affected my health so much I was obliged to leave Clapham. And I cannot consent to return to "The Nest" unless Elaine— [*Descriptive gesture.*]

ELAINE. Nor can I—unless——

SIR R. Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! [*In a very calm and judicial tone.*] Is there only one blind to this window, or is there also a small muslin blind?

ELAINE. There is a small muslin blind.

[PYBUS *nods acquiescence.*

SIR R. What is the distance from the top of the muslin blind to the top of the window?

ELAINE. Four feet.

PYBUS. Three, my dear.

ELAINE. Four.

PYBUS. I'm sure, my darling——

ELAINE. I measured.

PYBUS. I'm sure—my dear, if you will contradict—— [*Piteously.*

SIR R. Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! We'll have

it measured again. [*To* PYBUS.] The looking-glass is immediately under the window?

PYBUS. [*Pathetically.*] The looking-glass is unfortunately broken.

SIR R. Kindly replace it at my expense. [*Proceeds judicially.*] If the roller blind were drawn down each morning to exactly half the distance between the top of the window and the top of the muslin blind, it would allow plenty of light for you to shave by, Mr. Pybus?

PYBUS. Yes,—yes, I think so, but really I cannot——

SIR R. Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! Tsch! [*Turning to* ELAINE.] And it would also protect any one inside the room from the observation of the neighbours opposite?

ELAINE. Yes. Unless any one went near the window.

SIR R. Well, now, it seems to me it would be convenient to every one concerned if during the time Mr. Pybus is shaving in the morning the roller blind is drawn down exactly half the distance. And during that time it would be convenient if you, Elaine, did not go within two yards of the window.

Enter Waiter.

WAITER. Sir Joseph Darby and Mr. Harabin are outside, Sir Richard.

SIR R. Show them in. [*Exit* Waiter.] Now, won't

that arrangement enable you to return in perfect agreement like doves to the nest?

PYBUS. [*Doubtful.*] Yes, perhaps, but——

ELAINE. Well, that depends——

SIR R. Go and take a pleasant little stroll in the gardens, [*Getting them off at window.*] and arrange in future for the blind to be just half-way up—that is to say, neither up nor down!

[*Gets them off at window.*

Enter Waiter, *showing in* ADMIRAL *and* LADY DARBY.

[*Exit* Waiter.

SIR R. [*To* ADMIRAL.] Well, how does he seem now?

[ADMIRAL *shakes his head very sympathetically, and points to* JAMES HARABIN, *who enters very slowly, hands in pockets, very downcast and miserable. He walks despondently to armchair, drops into it listlessly, and stares in front of him with the pathetic expression of a man very much ill-used by the world.*

ADMIRAL. [*Pointing to* HARABIN *as to a martyr.*] There! There you see the result of all this tomfoolery of woman's higher education! There you see what happens when a woman takes the bit into her mouth. A man's peace and happiness utterly ruined!

[HARABIN *sits in plaintive silence, taking no notice.*

LADY D. Quite true, Jo, but [*with a severe look at* HARABIN] that does not excuse a man for forgetting, that he has got a good wife, and——

ADMIRAL. [*Quickly.*] No, my darling; when a man has a good wife it's a rascally shame to forget her. And to think that next Saturday I shall be compelled to leave you for—— [*Is much affected.*] Ah, Victoria, if you had only been a good sailor!

LADY D. I'm not so sure that we should have been any happier, Jo. You never seem to appreciate me so much as you do the week before you leave me, and the week after you return.

ADMIRAL. Well, perhaps it's best as it is, my love, perhaps it's best as it is!

HAR. [*Feebly, pathetically.*] Kato, I'm all to pieces. I couldn't eat any breakfast.

SIR R. [*Ringing bell.*] My dear Jim! What shall it be? A chop, steak, bacon and eggs——

HAR. [*Shuddering, shakes his head piteously.*] Could they manage an anchovy sandwich, and a glass of dry champagne?

Enter Waiter.

SIR R. Anchovy sandwich, and a small bottle of the best dry champagne.

ADMIRAL. Do you know, Kato, I feel that an anchovy sandwich and a glass of champagne would just keep me going till lunch.

SIR R. Anchovy sandwiches for two, and a large bottle of the best dry champagne. [*Exit* Waiter.

ADMIRAL. My appetite is something remarkable.

HAR. I haven't made a decent meal for months.

ADMIRAL. [*Very sympathetically, again points to* HARABIN *as to a martyr.*] Ah! there it is, you see. A woman runs away from her duties. What happens? Everything goes to rack and ruin! A man's meals, a man's health, all his little home comforts and luxuries completely sacrificed!

HAR. What did Sue say about meeting me, Kato?

SIR R. Well, the fact is, Jim, I—I believe Mrs. Quesnel is talking very kindly about you. And, perhaps, if Lady Darby were to go over to Sue and help the negotiations, we might induce Sue to come over to lunch and make it up.

LADY D. I'll go and see what I can do. But really, there is no excuse for a man——

ADMIRAL. No, my love, none whatever! And when I think [*Much affected, breaks off.*]—Go and put it very nicely to her, dear. I'll come over as soon as I have had my anchovy sandwich, and we'll go for a nice little stroll together, shall we? Ah! how this place reminds me of old days! [*Much affected again.*

LADY D. Don't be foolish, Jo. [*Exit at door.*

ADMIRAL. [*As he closes the door after her.*] There goes the best woman in England! Ah, Jim, it's a great pity for you young men that the good old stamp of English girl and wife is getting extinct!

Enter Waiter, *with a tray of anchovy sandwiches, and a bottle of champagne; pours out three glasses.*

ADMIRAL. What do you think of English women to-day, Kato?

SIR R. I have met with some of all sorts.

[ADMIRAL *comes up to table, takes up a glass of champagne.* HARABIN *sits and looks gloomily in front of him.*

ADMIRAL. [*Glass in hand.*] You've had a great deal of experience in the marriage question.

SIR R. [*Taking glass.*] Outsiders' experience —yes. [*Exit* Waiter.

ADMIRAL. What is to become of society—[*Drinks.*]—A very good glass of champagne, Kato! What is to become of society if women insist on turning everything topsy-turvy, eh? [*Takes an anchovy sandwich.*

SIR R. [*Drinks.*] I don't know. Have a glass of champagne, Jim. [*Giving champagne to* HARABIN, *who takes it moodily and gloomily, sits holding it in his hand without drinking.*

[*During the following scene the* ADMIRAL *helps himself very freely to champagne, and eats nearly all the plate of sandwiches.* HARABIN *sits very moody and gloomy, scarcely touches one or the other.*

ADMIRAL. Where are we going, eh?

[*Eats a large mouthful of anchovy sandwich.*

SIR R. Ah, just so. Take a sandwich, Jim.

[*Giving a sandwich to* HARABIN, *who takes it, makes a face at it, and sips a little wine, gloomily.*

ADMIRAL. That's what I ask myself. [*Another mouthful.*] Where are we going?

SIR R. Ah! Where are we? Well, I can afford to look on with the complacent curiosity of an intelligent rustic who sees the coach rattling down the hill at a devil of a rate with runaway leaders and no brake. I can only mildly speculate whether there will be a smash-up.

ADMIRAL. [*Very solemnly.*] Kato, take my word for it, there will be a smash-up.

SIR R. I shouldn't wonder. Of what?

ADMIRAL. Of the marriage coach—if we men don't keep a tight hold of the reins. And a devil of a smash-up it will be!

SIR R. Ah! Thank God I'm not a passenger.

ADMIRAL. [*Taking another sandwich.*] Here's an instance of it. [*Points to* HARABIN, *who is toying with a sandwich and vainly trying to get a mouthful of it down.*] Jim has his little failings. But because a man has his little failings, is that any reason for his wife running amuck amongst all the conventions and proprieties of social life, eh? What's your opinion?

SIR R. I have no opinion. I take no side. I merely watch the game.

ADMIRAL. And looking round I ask myself where we are going, eh, Jim?

[*Takes another sandwich.*

HAR. [*Moodily.*] I know where I'm going. I'm going to the dogs. Has Kato told you how they've cheated and swindled me?

ADMIRAL. Who?

HAR. Everybody. My servants, my tradesmen, and confounded womenkind.

ADMIRAL. [*Sympathisingly, sandwich in hand.*] Ah!

[*Points him out again as a martyr to* SIR RICHARD.

HAR. Why the deuce a man who has a perfect wife like I had, for Sue was as near perfection as possible, wasn't she, Kato?——

SIR R. You're her husband. You ought to know.

HAR. She was. Perfect manners! Perfect taste! And the best of tempers! What on earth could induce me——?

SIR R. The advantages and delights of a steady course of respectable monogamy are so many and so obvious, that I have never been able to understand how any man or woman could possibly deviate from it for one moment.

ADMIRAL. [*More sandwich.*] If ever there was a jewel of a wife it's Lady Darby. God bless her! Here's her health. [*Drinks.*] I don't deserve her. She's too good for me. When I remember what

an unfaithful rascal I've been, and the lies I've had to tell—the awful lies—[*Is overcome with painful reminiscences and weeps.*

HAR. I never knew what a good wife was till Sue left me.

ADMIRAL. [*Getting very confidential, and a little maudlin.*] You wouldn't believe me, Jim, [*Pawing* HARABIN *affectionately*] if I were to tell you half of the particulars of my—my unfortunate history. [*Crying a little.*] Of course, in these matters [*Turning to* SIR RICHARD, *and taking him in*] we must all make great allowances for men [SIR RICHARD *acquiesces*], especially for sailors. How do you account for it, Jim [*Suddenly brightening into great joviality and pride*], that the best Englishmen have always been such devils amongst the women? Always! I wouldn't give a damn for a soldier or sailor that wasn't, eh? How is it, Jim?

HAR. [*Still absorbed in his own woes.*] I don't know, and I jolly well don't care.

ADMIRAL. Yes. Taking all things into consideration I can forgive myself a good deal. But when all's said and done, nothing can disguise from me awfu' fac', Kato, that I have behaved like a disgraceful scoundrel, best of wives. [*Is again overcome, and weeps.*] And if I knew any possible way in which I could blot out the past, I'd do it freely and willingly. What would you advise me to do, Kato?

SIR R. In the absence of any possible amend-

ment of conduct in the past, or any probable amendment of conduct in the future, I think a good display of hearty repentance in the present is all that can be reasonably demanded from any man.

ADMIRAL. If I were to go down on my knees to her I couldn't express a thousandth part of the sorrow I'm feeling at this moment.

HAR. If I can only get Sue to settle down comfortably again with me, I'll reform and make a model husband for the rest of my life.

ADMIRAL. Ah, that's just what I've said to myself scores of times. And once or twice I've kept my word—for a considerable period, I may say a very considerable period,

HAR. But I mean it. Never again! These last ten months since Sue left me, I've had such a lesson of the treachery, the extravagance, and the heartlessness of womankind, that from this time forward I am fully determined I will never again——

Enter LADY DARBY.

HAR. What does Sue say?

LADY DARBY. She says she'll have nothing to say to you.

HAR. Very well. [*Rises resolutely, takes hat, goes to door, suddenly stops.*] Lady Darby, do you suppose that—she refuses to return to me because—she has—introduced——

LADY D. Oh no, you may make yourself quite easy on that point.

HAR. You're quite sure?

LADY D. Quite sure.

HAR. Very well. [*Goes to door.*]

SIR R. Where are you going, Jim?

HAR. To the telegraph office. You'll bear me witness, Kato, how awfully cut up I was, and how thoroughly I had determined to turn over a new leaf. But now I feel justified in taking advantage of any course of conduct that may present itself.

[*Exit.*

ADMIRAL. [*Points to* HARABIN'S *exit as to that of a martyr, then turns to* LADY DARBY *with resolute voice and manner.*] Where is Sue staying?

LADY D. At No. 7, Marine Gardens, just opposite.

ADMIRAL. [*With great resolution.*] Take me to her.

SIR R. What are you going to do?

ADMIRAL. I'm going to bring her back to her senses. A woman has no right to shake the foundations of society in this way. I shall tell her very plainly that this kind of behaviour must be put a stop to!

SIR R. That tune won't do with Sue. Send her over to me.

ADMIRAL. But, my dear Kato——

SIR R. Send her to me. I shall handle her better than you will.

ADMIRAL. Very well. [*Turns to* LADY DARBY.] Ah! What a comfort it is to have a wife of the good old-fashioned sort like you, Victoria!

[*Exeunt* ADMIRAL *and* LADY DARBY *at balcony.* SIR RICHARD *is left alone. Walks up and down, puzzled. A knock at door.*

LUCIEN *enters.*

LUCIEN. [*Letters in hand.*] I've looked through the letters, Sir Richard, and——

SIR R. Lucien, I've got a case that is puzzling me a geat deal.

LUCIEN. Indeed!

SIR R. It may never come into court, but—it's puzzling me. It has just occurred to me that you might help me.

LUCIEN. Anything that I can do.

SIR R. It is concerned with the extraordinary practices of an English clergyman at Cairo. This English clergyman, the Reverend Samuel it seems—I forget his church—Saint—Saint—Saint Something. What are the English churches at Cairo?

LUCIEN. I don't remember.

SIR R. [*Still pretending to be puzzled.*] Saint—ha,—you can't remember the English churches?

LUCIEN. No. I never went into one all the while I was there.

SIR R. Then I'm afraid you can't help me. So you never went to church at Cairo? Bad boy! Bad boy! You never went to church?

LUCIEN. [*Innocently.*] No, not once. [*Suddenly remembers, shows a little alarm.*] Yes, I went the last Sunday night I was there. I remember now.

SIR R. [*Carelessly.*] What was the name of the church?

LUCIEN. Saint—Saint—Something.

SIR R. What was the church like?

LUCIEN. The inside?

SIR R. Yes.

LUCIEN. The inside? [*Beginning to flounder.*] There was nothing remarkable about the inside.

SIR R. Was it a large church?

LUCIEN. Yes—rather—rather a large church—a medium-sized church—[*Catches* SIR RICHARD'S *eye.*] You're pumping me!

SIR R. Pumping you, my dear boy? I only wanted to get a few particulars. If you don't care to tell me, it's of no consequence.

LUCIEN. [*Getting a little angry.*] I'll tell you all I remember. There was an aisle, and—I've an impression, but I can't be quite sure, that there were large pillars—and—and—[*Gets a little more confused under* SIR RICHARD'S *glance.*] the sermon was a very long one.

SIR R. [*Looking at him.*] Ah!

Enter PYBUS *at balcony.*

PYBUS. I beg pardon, Sir Richard, but if you will kindly help us a little, I think we might arrange some basis for our returning together to the Nest.

SIR R. Very well, Mr. Pybus.

LUCIEN. Good-bye, Sir Richard.

[*Offering hand.*

SIR R. [*Offering him the "Times."*] No, sit down. I want to have a little more talk about this long sermon. [*Pushes the "Times" into his hands and gently pushes him into the arm-chair.*] Now, Mr. Pybus.

PYBUS. [*Confidentially to* SIR RICHARD *as they go off at balcony.*] If you wouldn't mind hinting to Elaine that if she could surround me with that necessary atmosphere——

SIR R. Ah!

PYBUS. Really, she does n't give me any impetus, any afflatus.

SIR R. [*Sympathisingly.*] Ah! Ah! Come along. We'll see about it.

[*Exeunt* SIR RICHARD *and* PYBUS *by balcony.* LUCIEN *is seated behind the paper. Short pause.*

Enter Waiter *showing in* LADY SUSAN.

[*Exit* Waiter.

[LUCIEN *rises, puts down paper, comes to her.*

LADY S. [*Embarrassed.*] My uncle sent for me——

LUCIEN. He's outside in the garden. We've only a few moments. [*Coming to her.*

LADY S. No, no. [*Breaks away from him.*] Oh, you'll go! You'll be kind to me and go!

LUCIEN. I shall do what you tell me, if it is to kill myself.

LADY S. How can you talk so rashly?

LUCIEN. Because I mean it. I'll go if you tell me. It will be a harder parting than the last, but I'll do it. It will break my heart, but I'd rather break my heart with longing for you than win all the other women in the world. [*Her face shows great pleasure.*] You needn't think you'll have any trouble in getting rid of me. [*Going from her.*

LADY S. You'll break *my* heart if you talk like this.

LUCIEN. You love me still?

LADY S. Is there any need to ask that? And you—you love me still?

LUCIEN. I've never loved any woman but you. I never shall if I live a thousand years. You don't know how you have sweetened all my life. Those weeks at Cairo! They're like a splendid dream. All's dull grey with me now for the rest of my life.

LADY S. All's dull grey with me for the rest of my life. What am I saying?

LUCIEN. [*Clasps her, takes her hand, sees ring on it.*] The ring I gave you. [*Kisses her finger.*] Give me something in return.

LADY S. Will you leave me then? Oh, this is madness. You'll go? You'll go? Oh, promise me!

LUCIEN. If you bid me.

LADY S. [*Taking off a ring.*] Here's a ring Uncle Dick gave me ten years ago. I've worn it ever since. You'll never part from it?

[*Taking ring off finger and giving it to him.*

LUCIEN. Never.

[*Takes it, is about to put it on his finger.*

LADY S. No, don't put it on now. Uncle Dick would recognise it. Put it on the moment you have left me, and wear it always.

LUCIEN. Always. To my last breath.

LADY S. You'll never speak of me?

LUCIEN. I have never breathed your name to a living soul from the moment I left you. I never will. Don't you see, I cannot speak of you? I must hide you. I shall hide you in my heart till I die.

LADY S. And I shall hide you in my heart till I die. [*Looking off at balcony.*] We've only a moment.

LUCIEN. One moment in all our lives.

LADY S. Good-bye.

LUCIEN. Good-bye. [*Clasping her.*] No! I can't give you up! Sue, we belong to each other. I'll give my whole life to make you happy.

LADY S. [*Struggling in his arms.*] No, no! I daren't! I daren't! What will become of me?

LUCIEN. Trust me. You're mine already. You can't trust me more than you have trusted me. You sha'n't deny me! You sha'n't cheat yourself and me of all that makes life worth living. I cannot leave you! I will not!

LADY S. [*Desperately.*] What can I do? What can I do?

LUCIEN. Meet me to-morrow night at eight—the Continental mail, Cannon Street Station. We'll go over to the Continent. You'll come? You must! You shall!

LADY S. [*Desperately.*] Yes. [*He takes her hand, kisses it.*]

LADY S. Hush!

LUCIEN. To-morrow night—Cannon Street Station. [*She nods.*

Enter SIR RICHARD *at window.* LADY SUSAN *and* LUCIEN *show a little confusion.* SIR RICHARD *looks keenly from one to the other and back again.*

SIR R. [*In a very calm matter-of-fact tone.*] Lucien, I've been consulting the time-tables, and I find if you leave to-morrow morning by the eleven o'clock train, you'll have time to make those inquiries for me about the clergyman in Cairo, and still catch next Thursday's boat to New Zealand.

LUCIEN. I'm very sorry, Sir Richard; it's impossible.

SIR R. Not a bit, my dear boy. Now go back to Eastgate at once, up to town by the two fifteen, dine with me at Brooks's to-night at eight, and off you go to-morrow morning at eleven.

LUCIEN. I'm very sorry—I can't.

SIR R. I'm very sorry, but you can, and you will.

LUCIEN. I've certain things to do.

SIR R. And certain things to leave undone. [*Very sternly.*] Come, sir, you leave at eleven to-morrow. [*Very firmly.*

LUCIEN. [*More firmly.*] No.

SIR R. [*Still more firmly.*] Yes, I say, yes.

LUCIEN. But I——

SIR R. But I say "Yes." [*In a very kind but firm tone.*] Come, my lad, understand me, I mean it. Off you go. [*Opens the door, stands with it open.*] Pack! Pack! Pack!

LUCIEN *has a moment or two's indecision, exchanges one last agonised look with* LADY SUSAN, *and then is about to rush off.* SIR RICHARD *at door intercepts him, offers his hand.* LUCIEN, *after another moment's indecision, takes it, wrings* SIR RICHARD'S *hand.*

SIR R. [*Cordially shaking hands.*] There's a good lad! [LUCIEN *rushes off.* SIR RICHARD *closes door after him, comes to* LADY SUSAN, *with great decision. Very resolutely.*] Now, my very dear Sue, I'm going to have a little talk with *you.*

LADY S. [*A little alarmed, a little cowed, a little defiant.*] What about?

SIR R. It's time this pretty little escapade of yours was ended. People are beginning to talk about you, and you've gone just as far as it's possible to go without running the risk of becoming déclassé.

LADY S. Déclassé? There are plenty of women who are not good, and who are not déclassé.

SIR R. Very likely. Women are divided into two classes.

LADY S. Good and bad.

SIR R. Not at all. Those who 'ave lost their reputation, and those who 'ave kept it. I'm determined you shall keep yours.

LADY S. Thank you, my dear Uncle Dick. I've kept my reputation, such as it is, up to now, and I assure you, it's quite safe in my keeping for the future.

SIR R. Very likely. But I'm going to make sure of it.

LADY S. [*Provokingly.*] Oh, indeed! And how will you do that?

SIR R. Your husband is here. He's anxious for you to return to him and your home.

LADY S. [*Defiantly.*] I've told you, no, no, no.

SIR R. Very well. Then, my dear Sue, as I've seen nothing of you for the last ten months, suppose you come on a little visit to me.

LADY S. When?

SIR R. At once. This afternoon, by the four thirty.

LADY S. No. I'll come in two or three weeks.

SIR R. What are you going to do in the meantime?

LADY S. Do? Nothing.

SIR R. Where are you going?

LADY S. Going? Nowhere.

SIR R. You're going to stay here?

LADY S. Yes—of course.

SIR R. How long?

LADY S. Just as long as I feel inclined.

SIR R. Very well. I'll come and stay with you.

LADY S. You can't. There's no room in the house.

SIR R. I'll get rooms next door.

LADY S. What for?

SIR R. Just to be near you.

LADY S. It's ridiculous! Impossible!

SIR R. Not a bit. My dear girl, make up your mind that, at all costs, you're going to have my company for the next few weeks.

LADY S. Indeed I won't. I won't have you in my house. I'll turn you out.

SIR R. I'll stay on the doorstep. Understand me, my dear Sue, I shall haunt you like your shadow, and there will be no escaping from me. Now you know what is in store for you, so behave like a good girl and give me a hearty welcome.

LADY S. Indeed, I won't! I'll run away from

you. [*Getting into a temper, walking up and down with great indignation, uttering little cries.*] Really! Of all the absurd—Well!—What next!—I never—Oh! [*Turns round and faces him, very resolutely.*] Now, Uncle Dick, I love you very much, but don't drive me to kick over the traces.

SIR R. My dear Sue, I'm going to take very good care that you don't.

LADY S. Really, of all the unwarrantable—[*Bursts into a fit of angry laughter.*] Once for all understand me, Uncle Dick, I'm my own mistress, and I'm going to do just as I please.

SIR R. No, my dear Sue, you are going to do just what is suitable for my niece, and for an English lady with her own reputation and the reputation of her family to consider.

LADY S. No, I'm not. I'll—I'll—[*Bursts into a fit of angry tears.*] I'll do something that will make you horribly ashamed of me. I will, Uncle Dick. I'll——[*Steps up to him, is about to snap her fingers at him.*]

SIR R. Ah! [*Catches her hand and puts it down.*] My dear Sue, you may snap your fingers at your husband, but you must not snap your fingers at me!

LADY S. [*Struggling to get her hand.*] I hate you, Uncle Dick! I hate you!

[*Stamping her foot at him.*

SIR R. [*Complacently.*] Very well, my dear Sue. Hate me as much as you please, but understand,

there are the three proverbial courses open to you, and one of those three proverbial courses you'll take, and no other. Firstly, you can return to your home with your husband——

LADY S. [*Defiantly.*] No.

SIR R. Or, secondly, you can stay here in my very delightful and constant company.

LADY S. No.

SIR R. Or, thirdly, you can return to Harley Street with me, and I'll give you a comfortable home as long as you please. Which of these three courses will you take?

LADY S. Neither! Neither! Neither!

Enter HARABIN *at door.*

HAR. [*Coming in.*] I say, Kato—[*Sees* LADY SUSAN.] I beg your pardon.

[*Beats a hasty retreat, shuts the door after him.*

SIR R. [*In an alarmed tone to* LADY SUSAN.] For heaven's sake, Sue, don't be a fool!

LADY S. [*Frightened.*] What do you mean?

SIR R. I'm trying to save you. Take care that Jim—— [*Stops.*]

LADY S. [*Still more frightened.*] Jim doesn't know?

SIR R. Not at present. But take care. One false step and you're lost.

LADY S. Lost? What do you mean? What do you know?

SIR R. [*Very solemnly.*] The sermon was a very long one!

LADY S. [*In an agony of fright.*] Uncle Dick, I've done nothing wrong. You believe me, don't you? There wasn't even so much as an innocent flirtation. There wasn't, indeed! You believe me, don't you? [*Very much agitated.*

SIR R. Yes, I believe you, but—[*Very mysteriously*] appearances!

LADY S. [*In an agony of fright.*] Appearances? Appearances? What appearances?

SIR R. [*Very solemnly, very mysteriously.*] That last Sunday evening at Cairo!

LADY S. [*Frightened.*] E—h?

SIR R. [*Very decidedly.*] Which of the three courses will you take?

LADY S. [*In a quiet, humble voice.*] I'll go back to Harley Street with you.

Curtain.

Fifteen months pass between Acts 2 *and* 3.

ACT III.

SCENE. *At* SIR RICHARD KATO'S *at Harley Street. Very snug bachelor's apartments, handsomely furnished. Door right. Door left. Fireplace at back. Window in corner up left. A winter evening. Lamps lighted. Large fire burning. Discover* KIRBY *showing in* INEZ *left, in handsome winter dress and fur cloak.*

KIRBY. I'll tell Sir Richard you are here, ma'am.

[*Exit left.*

As KIRBY *is going out,* LADY SUSAN *enters right.*

LADY S. Dearest, I heard your voice. [*Kisses her.*

INEZ. I've been out all day. When I got home I found a note from Sir Richard asking me to come round.

LADY S. You're to take me out to dinner this evening.

INEZ. Oh! Then Sir Richard has a family party?

LADY S. Yes, my husband is coming. So of course I must go.

INEZ. Why must you go?

LADY S. Why should I stay?

INEZ. Why shouldn't you? Is there any particular reason that you shouldn't meet your husband?

LADY S. [*Considering the matter in an indifferent tone.*] N-o. But, on the other hand, is there any particular reason that I should?

INEZ. You don't hate him?

LADY S. [*Indifferently.*] N-o.

INEZ. You love him? [LADY SUSAN *shakes her head.*] Just a little bit?

LADY S. Not a *tiny little* bit.

INEZ. You don't dislike him?

LADY S. [*Same careless indifferent tone.*] No. Rather the reverse. The longer Jim and I are parted the more I find a mild sort of liking for him stealing over me.

INEZ. Why won't you meet him and talk things over? He would give guarantees for the future.

LADY S. Really I don't wish to demand anything so unreasonable.

INEZ. Unreasonable?

LADY S. Considering what the creatures are, isn't it rather unreasonable of us to demand faithfulness from men?

INEZ. [*After a little pause, with considerable feeling.*] I know one man who was faithful.

LADY S. [*Sighs.*] Well, perhaps there is one in a million. Yes, Inez, I do believe there is one in a million. But no woman has ever married him!

Enter SIR RICHARD.

SIR R. How d'ye do?

[*To* INEZ, *shaking hands cordially.*

LADY S. She has done her duty, Uncle Dick.

SIR R. What duty?

LADY S. Begged me to stay and dine with my husband.

SIR R. Oh!

LADY S. And as that is impossible, she will now do the further duty of taking me to dine at the Bristol, and to the Lyceum afterwards.

Enter KIRBY *left, with card, which he brings to* SIR RICHARD.

LADY S. Come, Inez, I'll dress and come back with you. [*Taking* INEZ *off, right.*

SIR R. [*To* KIRBY.] Show Mr. Jacomb up.

[*Exit* KIRBY, *left.*

LADY S. [*Shows interest, stops at door, comes back.*] Jacomb? Isn't that the man—who——

SIR R. Yes, that's the man who—You'd better stay.

LADY S. It's no business of mine. Inez, this is some man who has met that Mr. Lucien Edensor in New Zealand, and——

Enter KIRBY, *left, announcing* Mr. Jacomb. *Enter* MR. JACOMB, *left.*

[*Exit* KIRBY.

LADY S. Very well, Uncle Dick. As you seem to wish it, I will stay.

JACOMB. [*A genial, rosy old fellow, about sixty.*] Sir Richard Kato? [SIR RICHARD *bows.*] I'm glad to meet you. [*Shaking hands.*] As I wrote I have a message for you from Mr. Lucien Edensor, and also one for Lady Susan Harabin.

LADY S. [*Startled, a little agitated.*] For me? impossible!

JACOMB. And one for Mrs. Quesnel.

INEZ. For me?

SIR R. [*Introducing.*] Mr. Jacomb. Mrs. Quesnel. Lady Susan Harabin. [*They bow.*

LADY S. [*Agitated.*] I'm quite sure you can have no message for me. [*Seeing that* SIR RICHARD *is watching her. To* SIR RICHARD.] What message can he have for me?

SIR R. Let's hear. [*Motions her to a seat. She sits down so that her face is hidden from* SIR RICHARD, INEZ, *and* JACOMB, *but quite in full view of audience.*]

SIR R. [*Motioning* INEZ *to a chair. Standing so that he can just watch* LADY SUSAN'S *face. She turns away from him.*] Now we are all attention. [*Moves a little forward so that he can again see* LADY SUSAN'S *face. She again turns a little further away from him. During following scene he watches her very closely, constantly edging to get her face in view.*]

JACOMB. A year ago last September I sailed for New Zealand with my brother Frank and his wife and daughter, his only daughter. Frank I must tell

you is the head of Jacomb, Perrin and Co. You may know the firm?

SIR R. New Zealand shippers, a very first-rate firm.

LADY S. But what has all this to do with me?

SIR R. Let's hear.

JACOMB. Well, on board there was a young fellow, Mr. Lucien Edensor. I noticed that he seemed very home-sick, poor fellow.

[*Seeing that* SIR RICHARD *is watching her,* LADY SUSAN *pretends to be bored, gazes at ceiling, yawns, etc.*

LADY S. [*Assumed indifference.*] Did he?

JACOMB. Yes, wouldn't eat, wouldn't talk, wouldn't play poker, wouldn't make chums, wouldn't do anything. Well, one night, over a cigar and a glass of whiskey, I drew him out, and of course it 'was all about a woman, poor fellow.

SIR R. All about a woman! Poor fellow!

LADY S. All about a woman! Poor fellow!

[*Yawns, looks at ceiling.*

JACOMB. His heart was broken, life was a hopeless blank, and he'd a great mind to end it there and then——

LADY S. Indeed!

JACOMB. Well, I took him into Frank's private cabin, and Mrs. Jacomb and Annie seemed to take a great fancy to him.

LADY S. Did they?

JACOMB. And to make a long story short, the

next day, just for the sake of whiling away the time on board ship, I made a sporting bet of fifty pounds with my brother Frank that there would be a match between his daughter Annie and young Edensor.

LADY S. Indeed! [*Same tone.*] Did you win?

JACOMB. You shall hear. My wife and I set to work, and from morning till night we did nothing but lay our heads together to bring it off. You wouldn't believe how interesting it was to watch them,

LADY S. It must have been. What was the result?

JACOMB. He held out. He couldn't forget this other woman. [LADY SUSAN *hides her face from those on stage, shows great delight.*] Yes, he held out, for over three weeks. [LADY SUSAN'S *face changes.*] I thought I should lose my fifty pounds.

[SIR RICHARD *is most keenly watching* LADY SUSAN *all the time*

INEZ. And at the end of the three weeks——?

JACOMB. He began to thaw. My fifty pounds was safe.

LADY S. You seem to have been alarmed for your fifty pounds. [*Rather pettishly.*

JACOMB. It wasn't the money. I couldn't bear to be beaten. I wouldn't have lost that bet for a thousand pounds. I was determined he should marry her.

LADY S. And—did he?

JACOMB. [*Fumbles in his overcoat pocket, brings out three little parcels tied round with white satin ribbon, looks at the addresses.*] I promised him I'd deliver these in person.

[*Offering one to* LADY SUSAN.

LADY S. For me? What is it?

JACOMB. Open it.

[LADY SUSAN *takes parcel, opens it, pulls out a letter and the ring she had given him in Act II., shows great pain. Meantime* JACOMB *has given the other two parcels to* INEZ *and* SIR RICHARD *respectively; they have taken them and opened them, finding in them tiny pieces of wedding-cake.*

INEZ. Wedding-cake! Why should Mr. Edensor send wedding-cake to me?

LADY S. Or to me?

[*Takes* LUCIEN'S *ring off her finger, puts it in the box, wraps letter round it, goes up to fire-place.*

SIR R. [*Nibbling.*] Very good wedding-cake it is, too. Won't you try it, Sue?

LADY S. You know I never eat sweets.

[*Throws box and all into the fire.*

INEZ. [*Putting hers in pocket.*] I'll sleep with mine under my pillow.

SIR R. And so they married and lived happy ever afterwards. [*Putting his parcel on table at back.*] Why didn't Lucien write and tell me?

JACOMB. He said you had chaffed him so much about the other one, and he didn't like you to know that he'd changed his mind so soon.

LADY S. So soon! But he was three weeks. He must have been genuinely attached to the other woman to have held out for so long as three weeks. What is your niece like?

JACOMB. I'd forgotten. I've a photograph of them taken together. [*Pulling photograph out of his breast pocket.*] There they are——

[*Showing* SIR RICHARD *the photograph.*

SIR R. [*Looking.*] He looks confoundedly happy, the rascal!

JACOMB. Never was a happier couple in this world!

LADY S. Will you allow me? [SIR R. *gives her the photograph. She takes it.*] Is your niece fair or dark?

JACOMB. Rather fair, Lady Susan, and she's a sweet-tempered little body.

LADY S. [*Looking at photograph.*] H'm, so she seems. Such women make the best wives. And Mr. Edensor held out for three weeks against those attractions. How could he? [*Giving back the photograph.*] Thank you. Very interesting.

JACOMB. [*Taking photograph.*] Well, I've delivered my message, Sir Richard.

SIR R. [*Rings bell.*] Thank you, Mr. Jacomb. I'll write Lucien and tell him I've received it safely.

JACOMB. [*Shaking hands.*] Delighted to have made your acquaintance. Good day, Mrs. Quesnel. Good day, Lady Susan.

[LADY SUSAN *and* INEZ *bow.*

KIRBY *appears at door.*

SIR R. Kirby, remind me to send half-a-dozen of that old Madeira to Mr. Edensor in New Zealand. The door.

JACOMB. [*Going off.*] You can't believe what trouble I had to make him understand he was in love with her. But I landed him! I landed him! And I won my fifty pounds!

[*Exit left, followed by* KIRBY.

LADY S. I must go and dress, Inez.

INEZ. I'll come with you, dearest.

LADY S. [*Pettishly.*] No, go and dress at home, and come back for me, and we'll dine at the Café Royal, shall we?

INEZ. I don't mind.

LADY S. Yes, and we'll go to something merry and rakish, not to a tragedy. I hate tragedies.

[*Exit right.*

[SIR RICHARD *opens the door for her. He closes the door after her, stands perplexed.*

INEZ. What's puzzling you?

SIR R. Mrs. Quesnel, what was the exact nature of Sue's acquaintance with Lucien?

INEZ. What does it matter? You needn't trouble about Sue. We women know the value of appearances. We are awful cowards, and have terrible leanings towards respectability. Sue won't shatter Mr. Harabin's family gods on his family hearth, or burst up Mr. Harabin's family boiler with any new-fangled explosive. And so long as Mr. Harabin's family boiler remains intact, why should you meddle with Sue? I must go and dress. My cloak, please.

SIR R. [*Helping her on with cloak.*] It's a brutal night. I wish you were going to stay and dine with us. How well you look in furs!

[SIR RICHARD *sighs.*

INEZ. Why do you sigh?

SIR R. Alas! My family gods! My family hearth! My family boiler!

INEZ. What of it?

SIR R. There's no one to tend it!

[*Pointing to his fireside.*

INEZ. And no one to burst it up.

SIR R. It wouldn't burst up if it were in the right person's care.

INEZ. [*Mischievously.*] Ah, but who would be the right person?

SIR R. Yourself, for instance.

INEZ. I wouldn't play tricks with the safety-valve.

[*Going.*

SIR R. [*Taking her hand.*] Stay. Would you

really undertake the charge—of—[*Pointing to hearth.*] —my family gods and family boiler?

INEZ. That depends. First of all I should like to know a little about the previous engineers. You are terribly concerned about Sue. How about yourself?

SIR R. Won't you trust me?

INEZ. No, I won't. You're a sensible man. I'm a sensible woman. I don't expect you to have lived till—how old are you?

SIR R. Say forty-five—it's a few years more, but say forty-five.

INEZ. Till forty-five without having loved. But I should like to know——

SIR R. What?

INEZ. Well, some particulars.

SIR R. [*Walks about a little perplexed.*] You don't want to know everything?

INEZ. No, not everything. But a good deal.

SIR R. If I tell you the leading outlines quite truthfully, will you tell me the leading outlines quite truthfully?

INEZ. Yes. How many times have you really loved?

SIR R. Only once, and that is at the presen moment. [*Looking at her*

INEZ. Good-bye. I wanted to know the truth.

SIR R. Don't go. I'll tell you—the truth.

INEZ. Honour? I really mean to be quite truthfu with you.

SIR R. Yes, but I hope your case won't—won't——

INEZ. Won't be as bad as yours? Oh, no, it won't. Rest assured of that. No woman's case ever is as bad as a man's. Now go on.

SIR R. I've thought myself in love scores of times, but I've only really loved once, and that was —[*Longish pause with great feeling.*] I won't tell you. It's too sacred. I did love that woman with all my heart and soul. And she loved me. [*Pause.*

INEZ. And those other scores of cases when you *thought* you were in love?

SIR R. Oh, they don't count.

INEZ. But I should like to get some—some general impression.

SIR R. What does it matter? There was a light girl——

INEZ. And a dark girl? Come, the whole catalogue.

SIR R. [*Rattles away, half seriously, half jestingly.*] A light girl, a dark girl, a red-haired girl; a tall girl, a short girl; a merry girl, a sad girl; a lean girl, a fat girl; a girl in mauve, a girl in white, a girl in green; a blonde, a brunette; a girl with eyes as blue as heaven, and a girl with eyes as black as jet; a quaker girl, a *danseuse;* a pale girl, a sallow girl, a rosy-cheeked girl; a peer's daughter, a milliner; a Scotch girl, an Irish girl, an Italian girl; and—some others. You can't say I haven't made a clean breast of it.

INEZ. And you have thought yourself in love

with all these? What does remain of your heart?

SIR R. All that doesn't belong to that one woman whom I did really love.

INEZ. Ah!

SIR R. Now it's your turn.

INEZ. Suppose I follow your example and lump them as you've done, and say that in vagrant hours I've had vagrant fancies for a light man, a dark man, a red-haired man; a tall man, a short man; a merry man, a sad man; a man in a blouse, a man in knickerbockers, a man in a kilt; a hunter in pink, and a bicyclist; a Scotchman, an Irishman, and—I won't say an Italian, but just to fill out the list I'll throw you in a couple of Spaniards, a Hindoo prince, and a young Japanese. Suppose I were to own up to all these?

SIR R. But, good heaven, you don't?

INEZ. No. But if I did?

SIR R. I should ask for further details.

INEZ. If I asked you for further details?

SIR R. I should decline to give them.

INEZ. And let me fill them in according to my wildest imaginations—let me guess how much of that spacious heart of yours was given to this stray companion, and how much to that stray companion. Ah, no, no, no, no! Let's draw a veil.

SIR R. But you haven't told me anything.

INEZ. I will. Sincerely I have loved once. And

I should like to remain constant, if constancy were not such a dream.

SIR R. Is constancy a dream?

INEZ. What else is it? You have loved once, and yet with her consecrated image in your heart's holy of holies, you have opened its outer courts to a rabble of petticoats; broken the bread and drunk the wine with sluts; tossed off life's sacrament with any strange priestess that offered it—look at the remains of the feast! Oh, no, no, no, my dear friend! if constancy isn't a dream, if faithfulness isn't a shadow, where are they to be found?

SIR R. Not in my heart. Yet I have loved once. Thank God for it!

INEZ. And I have loved once. Thank God for it! [*A long pause. They look at each other seriously, then smile, and then gradually laugh in each other's face.*

SIR R. To come back to——

INEZ. To Harley Street?

SIR R. And the previous question. What do you say?

INEZ. I'll think it over. [*Suddenly.*] Dear me! I've stayed here gossiping with you, and now if I don't make haste I shall be too late to get Sue away before her husband comes. My cloak! Quick!

SIR R. [*Helping her on with it.*] You do look well in furs.

INEZ. [*Fastening her cloak.*] Shall I tell you a secret? All women do.

[*She runs off.* SIR RICHARD *stands looking after her, blows a kiss after her, sighs, closes door, goes up to window, looks outside, draws curtain, takes out his watch, changes coat for smoking jacket, lights pipe, sits down at fire, sighs, looks at the fire, looks at the door where* INEZ *has gone off, blows another kiss after her, pokes the fire.*

Enter FERGUSSON PYBUS (*shown in by* KIRBY) *very pale and bilious; with a look of settled gloom on his face; a large black patch over one eye; carelessly and seedily dressed.* [*Exit* KIRBY.

SIR R. Good heaven, Mr. Pybus! what's the matter?

PYBUS. Haven't you heard? The Boadicean Society—my wife has got all the telegraph girls and shop girls in Clapham out on strike.

SIR R. Yes, so I see in the paper. Well?

PYBUS. I thought perhaps you might sympathise with me.

SIR R. [*Cordially.*] I do. [*Shakes his hand.*] What's the matter with your eye? Not—not *domestic*, I trust?

PYBUS. No. Mr. Cupples, our butcher [*Piteously.*]—I'm in a state of extreme nervous prostration. Cupples——

SIR R. Yes.

PYBUS. Elaine persuaded Mrs. Cupples to join her Boadicean Society. Cupples had been in the habit of spending his evenings at the King's Head. Last week the Boadicean Society went round to the King's Head, and sung temperance songs at Cupples, and then escorted him home. The next morning Cupples came round to the Nest and demanded an interview with me. I declined to see him, but he stayed outside, and as soon as I appeared, without waiting for me to disclaim all responsibility for my wife's actions, he took advantage of my state of nervous prostration, and——

SIR R. Poor fellow! Poor fellow!

[*Pats* PYBUS'S *shoulder sympathisingly.*

PYBUS. What would you advise me to do?

SIR R. With regard to Cupples? Do you owe him anything?

PYBUS. There is a little bill.

SIR R. What sort of a man is he?

PYBUS. He is a coarse, powerful man, with a copious supply of very abusive epithets.

SIR R. I should pay him his little bill. Then I should utterly refuse to have anything more to do with him. I should cut him dead.

PYBUS. Ye—es. Perhaps that would be best. And Elaine?

SIR R. Where is she?

PYBUS. I left her at the Nest this morning, addressing the post office girls from my bedroom window, and urging them, to make an example of the

Clapham postmaster. Sir Richard, you might have warned me of the nature of Elaine's temper.

SIR R. Ah! Didn't I mention something about tempers?

PYBUS. At the time I became engaged to her my prospects were most brilliant. If she had given me the least afflatus I feel sure I should have stamped myself on the age in some way.

SIR R. I'm sure you would!

PYBUS. But so far is she from giving me any afflatus, she will not even give me a light and easily assimilated course of diet. I cannot nourish my peculiar gifts on tinned mutton of the cheapest brands, and the more stringy portions of an underdone ham.

SIR R. Ah! Didn't I mention something about cooking lessons?

Enter KIRBY *left, with evening paper.*

KIRBY. I beg pardon, Sir Richard, I thought you might like to see—— [*Giving paper.*

SIR R. What?

KIRBY. [*Pointing to article in paper.*] The Clapham post office has been completely wrecked by the telegraph girls on strike.

[*Exit* KIRBY. PYBUS *groans and turns round in his chair.*

SIR R. [*Reading.*] "Progress of the strike. The Clapham postmaster put to flight, takes refuge in a coal cellar. Destruction of telegraphic communication with Clapham."

PYBUS. [*Looks up piteously.*] Am I liable?

SIR R. Somebody will have to pay the piper. And as your wife called the tune——

[PYBUS *groans.*

Re-enter KIRBY *left.*

KIRBY. Sir Richard, Mrs. Pybus has come in [PYBUS *jumps up*] and says she must see you at once.

PYBUS. Go and remonstrate with her, Sir Richard, and ask her—[ELAINE *enters,* PYBUS *sees her, has a furious outburst.*]—ask her what the devil will be the end of all this damned silly behaviour!

[*Exit* KIRBY.

ELAINE. [*Looks* PYBUS *up and down with the utmost contempt.*] The old weapons! Abuse and brute force! No other argument!

PYBUS. [*Rather more mildly.*] So it is—a damned silly—— [*Growls the end of the sentence under his breath to himself.*]

[ELAINE, *merciless, contemptuous, looks at him. He meekly subsides into his chair.*

ELAINE. [*Turns to* SIR RICHARD.] When to-day's revolution is complete it will no longer be *safe* for men to swear at their wives.

SIR R. I shall be sorry to note the disappearance of another picturesque old custom.

ELAINE. [*Severely.*] Please do not trifle. You have doubtless followed the recent course of events in Clapham——

SIR R. Yes. You seem to have been using a great deal of brute force with that poor devil of a postmaster.

ELAINE. It was the only argument he could understand. I have called to make a formal demand for the remainder of my fortune. [PYBUS *jumps up.*] I have immediate use for it.

SIR R. What use, may I ask?

ELAINE. To accelerate the progress of the new epoch.

PYBUS. [*Protesting.*] Sir Richard——

ELAINE. [*Just glances at* PYBUS, *then turns her back contemptuously on him.*] We had perhaps better discuss this matter apart from Mr. Pybus, as it is no concern of his.

PYBUS. [*Appeals.*] Sir Richard——

SIR R. Tsch! tsch! tsch! We won't discuss it at all. Rest assured I shall not hand over your fortune for any such nonsense.

ELAINE. Nonsense! He calls our new epoch nonsense!

PYBUS. [*Venturing.*] So it is! Damned silly, idiotic.

[ELAINE *looks fiercely at him. He mutters and subsides.*

ELAINE. [*To* SIR RICHARD.] You will find that we are in earnest.

SIR R. About what?

ELAINE. About re-organising society.

SIR R. I don't quite follow—how will wrecking Clapham post office re-organise society?

ELAINE. We must make a start somewhere.

SIR R. Begin at home, in your own lives. There's no other way of re-organising society. Go back to the Nest, and give Mr. Pybus a nice comfortable dinner.

ELAINE. No man shall receive dinner from me while the present inequalities between the sexes remain unredressed.

SIR R. [*To* PYBUS.] We shall all starve.

ELAINE. Please be serious. Do you deny that Woman has been most shamefully treated by Man?

SIR R. It isn't Man that's ungallant to Woman. It's Nature that is so ungallant and so unkind to your sex.

ELAINE. We will correct Nature.

SIR R. By changing your sex? What is it you ladies want? You are evidently dissatisfied with being women. You cannot wish to be anything so brutal and disgusting as a man. And unfortunately there is no neuter sex in the human species. *What do you want?*

ELAINE. We want freedom to develop our real selves.

SIR R. Hum—sounds like a deadly dull, unwholesome process. Still, for my part, you are quite welcome. But if that is your ideal, why did you marry Mr. Pybus? I don't see that he is necessary.

ELAINE. Mr. Pybus is not necessary. [PYBUS

jumps up protestingly.] There is an immense future for Woman——

SIR R. [*Interrupting.*] At her own fireside. There is an immense future for women as wives and mothers, and a very limited future for them in any other capacity. While you ladies without passions —or with distorted and defeated passions—are raving and trumpeting all over the country, that wise, grim, old grandmother of us all, Dame Nature, is simply laughing up her sleeve and snapping her fingers at you and your new epochs and new movements. Go home! Be sure that old Dame Nature will choose her own darlings to carry on her own schemes. Go home! Go home! Nature's darling woman is a stay-at-home woman, a woman who wants to be a good wife and a good mother, and cares very little for anything else. [ELAINE *is about to speak,* SIR RICHARD *silences her with a gesture.*] Go home! go home, and don't worry the world any longer about this tiresome sexual business, for, take my word, it was settled once for all in the Garden of Eden, and there's no more to be said about it. Go home! Go home! Go home!

ELAINE. [*Furious.*] Sir Richard, you are grossly indelicate!

SIR R. [*Blandly.*] I am. So's Nature. [*Cheerfully.*] Now I must go and dress for dinner.

Re-enter KIRBY *with another paper in his hand.*

KIRBY. Beg pardon, Sir Richard. Latest edition.

60991

I see there's a warrant issued for the apprehension——

[*Indicating* ELAINE. ELAINE *shows great consternation.*

ELAINE. Not for me?

KIRBY. Yes, ma'am. [*Exit.*

PYBUS. There, you see. I thought your Boadicean Society——

ELAINE. Silence. This is my affair. [*To* SIR RICHARD.] Do you think they will send me—away?

SIR R. [*Paper in hand.*] It looks uncommonly like it. [PYBUS *begins to look pleased.*

ELAINE. How long—do you suppose?

SIR R. The ringleaders at Birmingham got eighteen months.

ELAINE. [*In a fright.*] Eighteen months!

SIR R. Of course I shall defend you, and I shall do my best to get you off lightly. But you must take great care in the meantime, and, above all, no public speaking.

PYBUS. And she's such a good public speaker.

ELAINE. I cannot sacrifice my principles, nor will I be muzzled.

SIR R. [*Angry.*] Then, frankly, I won't defend you.

ELAINE. [*After a pause, has a great inspiration.*] I will defend myself!

SIR R. [*Horrified.*] Defend yourself! Don't talk such nonsense. You'll get five years.

ELAINE. The longer the better. Our cause

demands a martyr. I will surrender to-night. Please ring the bell.

[PYBUS *rings the bell with great alacrity.*

SIR R. You silly woman! Do you know what you are doing?

PYBUS. Sir Richard, do please let her know what is best for herself.

ELAINE. If I defend myself I shall be allowed to speak?

SIR R. [*Sarcastically.*] Oh, yes!

KIRBY *appears, door left.*

ELAINE. [*To* KIRBY.] A hansom at once, please. I have a message for this age!

[*Exit proudly in a glow of martyrdom, followed by* KIRBY.

SIR R. [*Having watched her off.*] Good heaven! How is it that women never will understand the Woman question? [*Turns to* PYBUS.] What do *you* intend to do?

PYBUS. I shall now return to the Nest. It is not naturally a noisy spot, nor are the inhabitants of Clapham an unruly class, except when they are incited by seditious persons. I may now perhaps be able to stamp myself upon the age.

SIR R. I dare say.

PYBUS. [*Going off at door, turns.*]—Sir Richard —[*Very nervously.*] in view of a period of quietude at the Nest, I really think it advisable for my wife to conduct her defence in person—[*Looking very imploringly at* SIR RICHARD.] I do, indeed. [*Con-*

tinues to look very imploringly at SIR RICHARD. SIR RICHARD *at length cordially grasps his hand.*] Thank you. Thank you.

[*Exit delighted, left, as* LADY SUSAN *in handsome evening dress and cloak re-enters by the other door.*

SIR R. [*Looking at her, takes her hands.*] You look very handsome, Sue. Hillo! then you've found my ring!

LADY S. Yes, it turned up the other day.

SIR R. Where?

LADY S. [*A little confused.*] Oh, I was turning over some old rubbish, and there it was.

SIR R. [*Looks at her keenly, her eyes drop, and she goes to the window, draws aside the curtain, discovers a thick fall of snow outside.*] What a night! Why do you insist on going out to dine?

LADY S. Why do you insist on asking people to dinner whom I cannot possibly meet?

Enter KIRBY, *showing in* HARABIN. KIRBY *announces* MR. HARABIN. *Exit* KIRBY.

LADY S. [*Very indignantly.*] Uncle Dick!

HAR. I beg pardon. I see there's a mistake.

[*Going back to door left.*

SIR R. [*Stopping* LADY SUSAN *at door right, calls across to* HARABIN.] Harabin, one moment. It's my fault. Let me frankly apologise to both of you. *Getting* LADY SUSAN *down stage, driving them*

nearer to each other.] First of all let us own there has been a mistake. And now the mistake is made let us make the best of it. [*To* HARABIN.] Lady Susan is dining out with Mrs. Quesnel, but as Mrs. Quesnel has not arrived, naturally Lady Susan is obliged to wait. [*Getting them nearer to each other all the time. To* LADY SUSAN.] Mr. Harabin is dining with me. He has come a little too early but I am sure you wouldn't wish me to send him out on such a night as this. [*Drawing her closer to* HARABIN.] Therefore he is obliged to wait. And so as you are both here don't you think you could manage—I won't say to entertain each other—but to endure each other's company for a few minutes? And if there is any little natural disinclination to make each other's acquaintance, let me give you a formal introduction. [*To* LADY SUSAN.] Mr. Harabin, a gentleman whose profound attachment and admiration for you has been steadily growing for the last two years. [*To* HARABIN.] Lady Susan Harabin, who I'm sure in her heart has no violent dislike for you. [*Suddenly.*] I must go and dress for dinner.

[*Bolts off very hurriedly, right, leaving them together. The two stand looking at each other in an embarrassed way for some moments. Then* LADY SUSAN *sits down, takes up an illustrated paper. Pause.* HARABIN *sits down.*

HAR. It's extremely cold.

LADY S. Extremely.

HAR. There's every indication of a very heavy snowfall.

LADY S. Indeed. [*Longish pause.*

HAR. I have never seen you looking so remarkably well.

LADY S. Indeed.

HAR. Really beautiful. I hope you don't think me rude in making remarks on your personal appearance.

LADY S. [*In an indifferent tone.*] No.

HAR. [*With great politeness.*] Wouldn't it be advisable to take off that heavy cloak while you remain in this hot room?

[LADY SUSAN *rises and slips it off.*

HAR. [*Rushing towards her.*] Allow me. [*By the time he gets to her the cloak is off. Reproachfully.*] You might have permitted me the honour——

[LADY SUSAN *reseats herself with great composure, and turns over the newspaper. He remains standing over her rather embarrassed. At length bursts out.*] Confound it, Sue, you might have a little pity on a poor devil!

LADY S. I cannot allow you to call me by my Christian name. If you do I shall be compelled to wait in another room. [*Pause.*

HAR. But do talk to me.

LADY S. What is there to discuss?

HAR. Ourselves—at least, yourself. Sue, do put down that paper.

LADY S. [*Rising going towards door.*] I told you I should go if you called me by my Christian name.

[*Is going off right.*

HAR. Let me open the door for you.

[*He goes hastily after her, she goes to door, tries to open it.*

LADY S. Uncle Dick has locked the door!

[*He again comes towards her, she goes towards the door, left.*

HAR. No, don't go. [*Places her a chair with great politeness.*] Do sit down again. [*She sits.*] I can't tell you how much I've suffered during your absence.

LADY S. Indeed.

HAR. And I've thoroughly determined to be the best of men in the future.

LADY S. I'm sincerely glad to hear it.

HAR. You might give a fellow a little encouragement.

LADY S. Encouragement?

HAR. To be good. No man can be good unless a woman encourages him.

LADY S. And not many men even then, it seems.

HAR. I could be very good if you were to encourage me a little. Sue—[LADY SUSAN *rises.*] Lady Sue—Lady Susan—[*He offers her the chair, she sits down.*] You have never really understood me.

LADY S. No? [*Looks at him attentively.*

HAR. I'm not at all a bad sort of fellow. You

don't know how awfully sorry I am for the past. And I'm really devoted to you.

LADY S. Indeed.

HAR. It's a beastly night outside. You'll only catch a bad cold if you go out. I say, Sue; let's all have a jolly comfortable dinner together, and let bygones be bygones.

[*Pause.* LADY SUSAN *considers.*

LADY S. On both sides?

HAR. Yes, on both sides. Of course there are no —no bygones on your side?

LADY S. Of course not. I suppose there are a good many on your side?

HAR. Eh? Eh? Well——

LADY S. You seem unwilling for me to touch upon your bygones.

HAR. [*Embarrassed pause.*] I assure you I'm not a bad sort of a fellow. And I've cherished your image throughout.

LADY S. Throughout a course of flirtations with all sorts of women?

HAR. Oh, not a course—and not all sorts. I assure you—there's nothing for you to trouble about.

LADY S. What do you mean by "nothing"?

HAR. Well, well—oh, very well, let bygones be bygones.

LADY S. [*Placidly.*] Very well.

HAR. You will? I can't tell you how delighted I am that you've forgiven me.

[*Is about to embrace her.*

LADY S. Stay. We are to take each other for better or worse, as we did when we were married, and the past is never to be once mentioned between us?

HAR. Never. You've forgiven me, haven't you?

LADY S. Yes.

HAR. Very well, what more is there to be said? [*With sudden alarm.*] Sue——

LADY S. What?

HAR. You—you haven't—been—flirting with anyone in the meantime?

LADY S. I thought the past was not to be mentioned——

HAR. No. But—— [*Shows great uneasiness.*

LADY S. I see, we had better remain strangers. I'll wait in the next room. [*Going.*

HAR. No, no. Sue, of course I trust you. But perhaps it would be best to have a thorough understanding once for all. Then we shall never have occasion to return to the subject again. Now! Have you anything to tell me?

LADY S. Have *you* anything to tell *me?*

HAR. Well—of course—[*Stops, then suddenly.*] Perhaps you'd better begin, as—yours will be so much simpler. The whole truth, mind.

[*Listens in deadly earnest, impatiently.*

LADY S. One evening at Cairo——

HAR. [*Eagerly.*] Yes——

LADY S. I'd been playing a nocturne of Chopin's in the dusk——

HAR. In the dusk? Where?

LADY S. In the drawing-room.

HAR. The public drawing-room?

LADY S. Yes. And as I finished——

HAR. Yes——

LADY S. Signor Massetti, the musician, who was staying in the hotel, started up from a chair at the back—I didn't know he was in the room——

HAR. [*Fiercely.*] Well——

LADY S. And—don't look so ferocious——

HAR. [*Maddened.*] Go on! Go on!

LADY S. He kissed——

HAR. Kissed you?

LADY S. My hand.

HAR. Your hand?

LADY S. Yes—several times.

HAR. Did he? Did he?

[*Pacing up and down the room.*

LADY S. Yes, don't be in such a temper. He's quite an elderly man.

HAR. So much the worse.

LADY S. And devoted to music.

HAR. I dare say, the old blackguard! How many times did he kiss your hand?

LADY S. Five or six.

HAR. [*Tortured.*] Five or six!

LADY S. Yes, but I'd really played very well.

HAR. The old scoundrel! And—what did he say?

LADY S. I forget exactly.

HAR. [*Fiercely.*] You forget?

LADY S. He complimented me on my playing.

HAR. Yes, but—what else?

LADY S. Nothing. That's all.

HAR. All? Really? Really, really all?

LADY S. All, until I've heard all you have to tell me. [*Long pause. He paces up and down rather agitated.*] Come. Aren't you going to begin?

HAR. I'm so much upset about your flirtation.

LADY S. You're not upset about your own—flirtations?

HAR. Yes, I am. I feel quite a touch of remorse when I remember them.

LADY S. My dear Jim, you don't feel anything like so much remorse for your own transgressions as you do for mine.

HAR. Naturally not. [*Goes to her very solemnly.*] Will you give me your word, your sacred word of honour, that it went no further than a kiss on the hand with this confounded old Signor What's-his-name?

LADY S. My sacred word of honour, it went no further than a kiss on the hand with Signor Massetti.

HAR. [*Looks at her, much relieved.*] I'm glad to hear it. And there's nothing else?

LADY S. Yes, a good deal.

HAR. [*Bristling up furiously.*] A good deal [*Fiercely.*] Go on! Go on! What else is there?

LADY S. There's all your side.

HAR. [*Relieved.*] We'll finish with your side first. I must insist on knowing——

LADY S. You must insist! [*Laughs at him.*] My dear Jim, don't be absurd. If it comes to that, I must insist on knowing—First of all this: when I was a good, faithful wife to you, why did you run after other women? Secondly, how have you employed yourself the last two years? And thirdly, how you are going to make me confess what I will have my tongue cut out rather than I will confess —that is, if there were anything to confess?

HAR. [*Tortured.*] If there were anything to confess!—then there isn't anything to confess?

LADY S. I don't say that.

[HARABIN *takes two or three desperate turns about the room in agony.*

HAR. Very well. I had thoroughly determined to be the best husband in England for the future. Yes, KIRBY *shows in* ADMIRAL DARBY *and* LADY DARBY *in door, left.* [*Exit* KIRBY. madam. You have lost the greatest chance of happiness that was ever offered to a woman on this earth, and you have wrecked my whole future.

[*Is going off.*

ADMIRAL. [*Seizes him gently.*] Shake down! Shake down! Shake down!

HAR. Let me go, Sir Joseph——[*Trying to get off.*

ADMIRAL. [*Turns him round.*] Shake down! Shake down! Shake down!

HAR. I wanted to let things shake down. I've

wanted to let them shake down for the last two years. But she won't let them.

ADMIRAL. Now, Sue, how is it that you won't let things shake down?

LADY S. I'm quite willing to let things shake down, but he won't let them.

ADMIRAL. Now, Jim, how is it you won't let things shake down?

HAR. You can't expect me while——

ADMIRAL. While what?

HAR. While she won't tell me——

ADMIRAL. What?

HAR. [*Fiercely at* LADY SUSAN.] How many elderly musicians kissed her hand in Cairo!

ADMIRAL. Sue, how many elderly musicians kissed your hand in Cairo?

LADY S. Only one, and Mr. Harabin knows all about him.

ADMIRAL. There you are, Jim. Only one, and you know all about him. Now shake down.

HAR. Very well—only—[*Very uneasy*]—then—there—there was—only one?

LADY S. [*Very coldly.*] Will you give me my cloak, Uncle Jo? Aunt Vic, we'll wait in the drawing-room.

HAR. No—no!

LADY D. [*Stopping her.*] Mr. Harabin, you don't suppose that Lady Susan during her absence from you has done anything that needs to be concealed?

HAR. Certainly not. Certainly not. But still——

[*Looks very uneasy. The lock of the door right is heard to turn.*

Enter SIR RICHARD *in evening dress.*

SIR R. Sir Joseph, Lady Darby. [*Shaking hands with them. To* LADY SUSAN.] Well, how do we stand now?

LADY S. As we were.

HAR. Sir Richard, I wish to ask Lady Susan one solemn question in the presence of you all.

LADY S. My dear Jim, I shall never answer it.

HAR. Then am I to think——?

LADY S. Just whatever you please to think.

[HARABIN *goes in great distress to* SIR RICHARD.

HAR. 'Kato, one moment. [*Draws* SIR RICHARD *down stage.* ADMIRAL *and* LADY DARBY *expostulate with* LADY SUSAN.] Sue won't say whether she has anything to confess, unless I confess everything to her.

SIR R. Very well. Confess everything to her.

HAR. Oh! that's impossible, you know.

SIR R. You don't suppose there's anything to confess on Sue's side?

HAR. No, I feel sure there isn't. But I should like to know. What shall I do?

SIR R. Sue looks very handsome.

HAR. Exquisite! Exquisite!

SIR R. I should stretch a point or two rather

than send her out in the snow when you can have a cosy dinner with her here and—make it up.

Enter KIRBY *showing in* INEZ *in evening dress.*

KIRBY. [*Announcing*] Mrs. Quesnel.

INEZ. My dear Sue, ten thousand apologies. It's an awful night, and I couldn't get a cab. But——

[*Looks at* HARABIN, *then looks inquiringly at* LADY SUSAN.

KIRBY. Shall I serve dinner, Sir Richard?

SIR R. Lay for six instead of four, and then serve.

[*Exit* KIRBY.

LADY S. Come, Inez. I'm quite ready.

HAR. No, don't go, Sue. Sir Richard——

[*Appealing to* SIR RICHARD.

SIR R. [*Goes to* LADY SUSAN.] Sue, can't you give Mr. Harabin some assurance——

LADY S. I've told him that bygones shall be bygones, and I will be a good faithful wife to him, if he will be a good faithful husband to me. He can take me or leave me on those terms.

SIR R. [*Looks very earnestly at* LADY SUSAN *for some moments.*] I think, Jim, your happiness will be quite safe in her hands.

[*Passing her over to* HARABIN.

HAR. I intend to be the best of husbands in the future. I'll give you my word——

LADY S. Your word of honour, as a gentleman?

HAR. [*Very quickly.*] Yes! My word of honour as a gentleman.

LADY D. Why didn't you forgive him at first, Sue, and save us all this trouble?

LADY S. [*Sighs.*] I wonder why I didn't.

LADY D. You see, dear, we poor women cannot retaliate.

LADY S. I see.

LADY D. We must be patient.

INEZ. And forgive the wretches till they learn constancy.

LADY S. I see.

LADY D. And, dear, yours is a respectable average case after all.

LADY S. Yes, a respectable average case after all.

Enter KIRBY.

KIRBY. Dinner is served, Sir Richard.

[*Exit* KIRBY.

SIR R. Take your wife in to dinner, Jim.

[HARABIN *gives his arm to* LADY SUSAN.

ADMIRAL. Victoria, I have only another fortnight on shore. Give me the pleasure and the honour of taking in to dinner the best woman and the best wife in England! [LADY DARBY *gives her arm to* ADMIRAL.] Ah, Victoria! when I remember——

LADY D. That's enough, Jo. Don't be foolish.

ADMIRAL. I can't help it. My conscience

troubles me. Some day, when I can summon courage, I will endeavour to tell you——

[*Takes her off very affectionately.*

LADY S. Uncle Dick, have you ever had a love affair of your own?

SIR R. Just one.

LADY S. You never speak about it.

SIR R. It's too sacred.

LADY S. [*Sighs.*] Ah! one does not speak of the most sacred things! [*To* HARABIN.] Now, sir, your arm, and don't forget I'm going to be a good wife to you.

HAR. I won't. How well you look, Sue! I'll take you down Bond Street to-morrow morning and buy you—the whole street! I've never loved you so much as I do at this moment.

LADY S. How long will your love last? For three weeks?

HAR. For three weeks! For life!

LADY S. Are you sure? Love me, Jim! I want to be loved! [*Exeunt* LADY SUSAN *and* HARABIN.

SIR R. [*To* INEZ.] Then I must take you?

INEZ. I don't see any alternative.

SIR R. [*More puzzled than ever.*] What *was* there between Lucien and Sue at Cairo?

INEZ. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

SIR R. Yes, but that sermon was a very long one! Do women ever tell the truth about their little love affairs?

INEZ. Do men?

SIR R. No wise man ever tells.

INEZ. No wise woman ever tells.

SIR R. I wonder——

INEZ. Wonder at nothing that you find in the heart of a woman, or the heart of a man. God has put everything there.

SIR R. Let us leave these problems [*kisses her hand very tenderly*] and go in to dinner.

[*Giving his arm to her. Curtain falls as they go off.*

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